

No. 1135

NEW YORK, JULY 1, 1927

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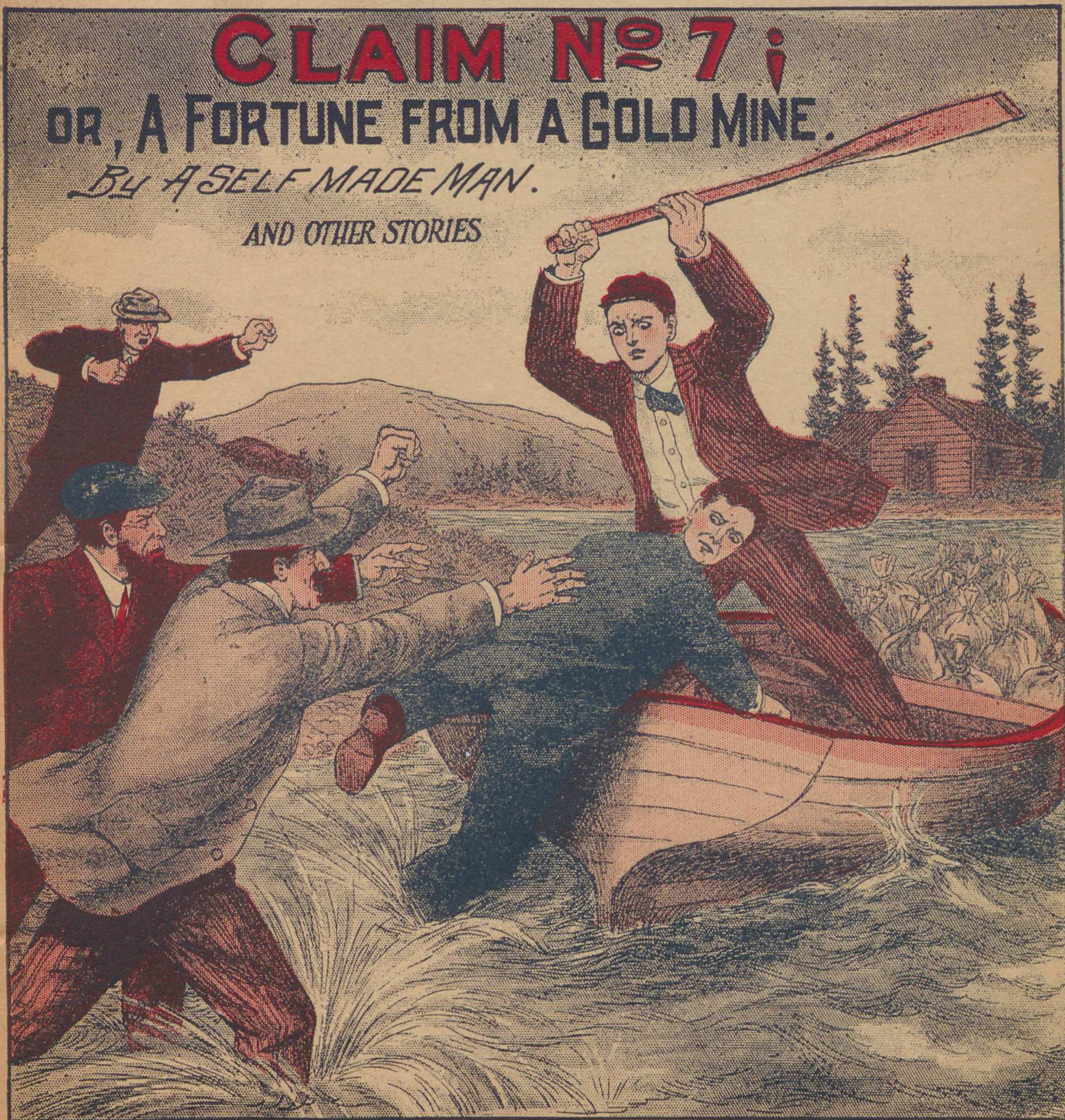
FAME AND FORTUNE WEEKLY.

STORIES OF
BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY.

CLAIM No 7;
OR, A FORTUNE FROM A GOLD MINE.

BY A SELF MADE MAN.

AND OTHER STORIES



"Come back here or it'll be worse for you!" roared Dave Hamlin, rushing into the water. followed by his two associates. "Stand back or I'll smash you!" cried Tom in a resolute tone, flourishing the oar to cover Bob's retreat.

FAME AND FORTUNE WEEKLY

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CLAIM No. 7

OR, A FORTUNE FROM A GOLD MINE

By A SELF-MADE MAN

CHAPTER I.—A Mexican Maid.

"Say, Tom, this Senorita Pepita is a peach," said Bob Gillette, nodding at the handsome sixteen-year-old daughter of Sebastian Castano, landlord of the little old-fashioned Mexican inn at which the two American boys had stopped for rest and refreshment.

This inn stood on the outskirts of a small rustic village in the foothills of the Sierra de Antunez mountain range, twenty miles east of the Sonora railway, and about seventy-five miles, as the crow flies, south by east, of Nogalez, Arizona, a town close to the Mexican border, where the Sonora line connected with the Southern Pacific railroad. The scenery round about was characteristic of northern Mexico. The valley, through which a dusty road wound like a long yellow ribbon, was fertile with semi-tropical trees and vegetation, with a detached hacienda here and there, its whitewashed wall peeping out from amid a mass of green foliage. The inn was right beside the road, on a curve that faced the range. The two boys, seated at a table under the spreading shade of a large tree which overlapped the low-roofed building, had the mountains, rising peak on peak, before them, in solitary grandeur. Upon one of the steeps, overlooking a deep ravine, stood a low rambling building, built of stone and partially surrounded by a high wall. Above the entrance gate was a cross, large enough to be seen from the inn. This was the monastery of the Black Brotherhood, an order of mendicant monks, so the boys had been told at Magdalena, where they got off the train.

"Bet your life she is," replied Tom Hammond, in answer to his friend's remark, as he sipped a cool drink with great satisfaction, for the weather was hot enough to do credit to the infernal regions.

"This is where you've got it on me," said Bob.

"How?" asked Tom lazily.

"Why, you speak Spanish like a native, while I don't know more than half a dozen words of the lingo. You have been carrying on a flirtation with the senorita ever since we've been here, and she's been making eyes at you like a house afire. All I can do is sit like a dummy and see you enjoy all the fun," growled Bob.

"Jealous, are you?" chuckled Tom.

"No, I ain't jealous, but I'd like to have a look-in on what's going on."

At that moment Senorita Pepita came to the door and turned her lustrous eyes upon Tom Hammond, with a sort of "goo-goo" glance that was decidedly bewitching.

Her attire, although made of ordinary materials, was on the whole rather chic and picturesque, and a jaunty headdress of bright colors set off her dark locks to much advantage. Tom motioned to her, and she approached the table.

"So your name is Pepita?" he said, in Spanish.

"Si, senor," she replied with a little courtesy.

"I suppose you have guessed that we are Americans?"

"Si. But you speak my language beautifully, senor."

"My mother taught me. She was a Cuban." Pepita smiled.

"Your friend—does he also speak Spanish?"

"I regret to say he does not. He regrets it, too, but never so much as now."

"Why, senor?"

"Because he is deprived of the pleasure of speaking to such a bewitching creature as yourself."

"Oh, senor!" cried Pepita with a blush, at the same time looking at Bob in a way that made him suspect he was the subject of his friend's last remark.

"Here, I say, Tom, what are you telling her about me?" he asked.

"I told her you called her a peach," grinned Tom.

"Do you want to make a donkey of me?"

"Not at all. Nature has done that already."

"Oh, come off! Don't get so funny!"

At that moment a distant chant or chorus reached their ears. The boys looked in the direction whence it came. Filing down the narrow pathway that ran from the road to the gate of the monastery they saw a procession of dark-robed men with cowls over their heads. At that distance they looked for all the world like a black caterpillar crawling along the circuitous path. One man walked a little distance ahead of the others. He bore a large white cross in front of him. The chant was slow and measured, and the monks kept pace with it.

"I suppose those are the monks of the Black Brotherhood, Pepita?" said Tom.

"Si, senor."

"They dwell in that building on the mountain side?"

"Si, senor."

"And how do they live?"

"Oh, they live well."

"I'll gamble on it they do. The clergy of all countries take especial good care to do that," laughed Tom.

"What are you two talking about now?" asked Bob. "I wish you'd speak United States."

"What did your friend say?" asked the girl, with womanly curiosity.

"He said your beauty has quite fascinated him, and he wishes he could talk with you," chuckled Tom.

Senorita Pepita blushed and turned a coquettish glance on Bob.

"Say, cut it out, will you?" growled Tom.

"What's troubling you now, my dear fellow?"

"You're talking about me again. That isn't a fair deal."

"Go on, you're dreaming! She asked me a question and I answered it."

"It was something about me, for after you answered she gave me one of her goo-goo looks."

"Maybe she's mashed on your shape."

"Mashed on nothing! I'll bet you two are making fun of me because I can't understand your blamed lingo."

"Your friend seems to be provoked at something," said Pepita, who noticed that Bob seemed annoyed.

"I think the chant of the Black Brotherhood yonder doesn't suit his fancy. He remarked just now that it reminded him of the tune the old cow warbled."

The girl looked puzzled at the latter part of Tom's answer. Catching sight of the boy's laughing eyes, she pouted:

"The senor is making fun of me."

"I wouldn't think of doing such a thing, senorita."

"You haven't told me your names, senor," she said, after a doubtful look.

"Oh, mine is Tom Hammond. My friend's is Bob Gillette. Make a bow, Bob," he added in English to his friend. "I'm introducing you."

Bob made a bow. The senorita immediately courtesied.

"Where did you come from, and why did you come out here?" she asked.

"We came from New York City."

"New York City," she repeated, as if trying to locate the place. "That is in the United States."

"It was when we left there, and I don't believe it has moved away."

The girl didn't seem to catch on to the humor of his remark.

"It is a big city—yes?"

"Rather. There are buildings there from twenty to thirty stories high."

"The senor is joking," she replied, with an incredulous look.

"No. That's the truth. There are some—a few—that height."

Pepita looked astonished.

"Well, my friend and I live there when we're at home. We came West to Tucson, Arizona, to see my friend's father, who is in the mining business in that neighborhood. This is our vacation time. We have ten weeks in which to have a good time. After remaining a week at the mine we decided, as we were so near Mexico, that we'd take a run down along the Sonora railway and

look at the country. We stopped off at Magdalena yesterday afternoon, and hearing about this Monastery of the Black Brotherhood, we concluded to come over and take a look at it, for the landlord of the inn we put up at last night told us it was two or three hundred years old, and a place of considerable interest."

"Oh, you can't go there, Senor Hammond," said Pepita.

"Why can't we?"

"Because no strangers are ever admitted."

"Aren't they? What a pity! We've taken our jaunt for nothing, then? No, not for nothing, for we've seen you, and that is a great pleasure," said Tom gallantly.

Pepita smiled and looked pleased at the compliment. She was quite taken with Tom's good-looking face, and free-and-easy manners. In fact, she had a very friendly feeling for Americans, for her mother, who was dead, had been a native of the United States. She herself had never learned to speak English, probably because her mother died when she was quite young, and though her father understood the language, he never spoke it except when he had dealings with Americans who did not understand Spanish. By this time the procession of the monks had drawn near, and it was evident they intended to pass along the road in front of the inn. The boys would, therefore, get a close view of them, even if they couldn't get into the monastery.

They continued their solemn chorus without intermission.

"It's a wonder those chaps don't get tired of that song," said Bob. "They keep repeating the thing over and over again. I suppose that's a Spanish hymn of some kind."

"No, that isn't Spanish."

"What is it, then?"

"I judge it is Latin. The Catholic clergy use that altogether in their religious exercises."

"So I've heard, but I never could understand it. Very few people understand it."

"It's the custom of the Catholic Church, and as it's the oldest in the world we must assume that the priests know their business and what is best for the people. Religion and politics are two things I don't care to argue about, so let's talk about something else."

CHAPTER II.—A Novel Expedient.

In a few minutes the procession of dark-robed and cowed men, for even their faces, which they held down, as if looking at the ground, were invisible, passed by, en route for the little village.

"I'd hate to pass my life in that lonesome-looking building, and put in my time singing and praying," remarked Bob, looking after the monks.

"I believe in letting every one follow his own taste," replied Tom. "They don't do anybody any harm, and probably they do a lot of good in their way. At any rate, the inhabitants around here believe in them, I guess. Pepita told me that they live well, and who knows what fun they may not have all by themselves up in their monastery?"

"Well, suppose we go up there now? It may be a good time to see the place, when most of them are away. You know we came out here expressly to see it, and I'm just dying with curiosity to get in there and look around."

"Then I'm afraid you'll be disappointed."

"Why so? Are you going to back out after getting as far as this?" asked Bob, with a look of displeasure.

"Me back out? Say, have you ever known me to be a quitter?"

"Then what are you talking about?"

"Pepita says that strangers are never admitted to the monastery."

"Well, if that wouldn't jar you!" cried his companion, looking disgusted.

"However, if we can't get inside, there is no law, I guess, preventing us from going up there and taking a close view from the outside."

"I'm with you," replied Bob with alacrity.

"Well, let's have another refreshment first. That drink Pepita fetched us goes to the right spot. There is nothing intoxicating about it, and it tastes good."

"That's right. Tell her to fetch two more."

Tom gave the order to the girl, and she brought the drinks to them in a few minutes.

"We're going to take a close view of that monastery, Pepita," said Tom, after paying her. "That is, from the outside, seeing that we can't get inside."

"From the outside!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, though we're both greatly disappointed because we can't see the relics, and all that, we've heard are in there."

"No, you mustn't go there, senor," replied the girl, a bit earnestly.

"I don't see anything to stop us," said Tom.

"The road, and the path beyond, will take us straight here without any trouble. If we only had a telescope we could sit up on one of those rocks and see you standing at the door of this inn."

"No, I don't want you to go there, senor."

"Why don't you want me to go there?"

"Because no stranger who went there ever returned."

"No? What happened to them?"

Pepita shrugged her pretty shoulders.

"Why, struck with the holiness of the place, they became monks themselves."

Tom laughed heartily.

"That's pretty good, Pepita. What sort of a monk do you think I'd make?"

"You mustn't make fun of such things," she replied with arch severity.

"Why, just think, if I became a monk you could have me for your father confessor. I'd come down every day and call on you."

"You wouldn't be allowed to come out except on certain days, like this, for instance. This is the fast day of their patron saint."

"I guess I don't care to become a monk. I'd sooner stay out in the world and work for my living like most people do."

Pepita laughed.

"Say, what are those big hampers for?" asked Tom, pointing at a couple of great earthen crocks encased in wickerwork, with a cover that fitted snug and a wicker handle, that stood near the corner of the inn.

"Those were brought here from the monastery by two lay brothers."

"What for?"

"To be filled with provisions and wine."

"Oh, I see. Where are these lay brothers now? I haven't seen them since we have been here."

"They went to the village to get something they want."

"They must be strong chaps to be able to carry those hampers filled up with bottles of wine and provender. Why don't they use a burro?"

"They do. It's in our stable."

"Are the hampers loaded now?"

"Yes, all ready and waiting to be taken to the monastery."

At that moment a woman in the inn called to Pepita.

"I'll be back presently," she said.

Tom called his companion's attention to the hampers.

"Let's take a peep and see what's in them?" he suggested.

They went to where the hampers stood, removed the covers and saw a lot of chickens and other things in the food line packed in straw.

"The wine bottles must be at the bottom," said Bob.

"I should have thought they would have stowed them at the top where they would not be so likely to get broken."

They were about to replace the covers when Bob said suddenly:

"Say, Tom, I've got a great scheme, if you're game to work it."

"What is your scheme?"

"You'd like to see the inside of the monastery, wouldn't you?"

"I wish I could; but if it's against the regulations of the monks you and I will have to take it out in wishing."

"Not if my scheme works."

"You haven't said what your scheme is."

"It's this: 'We'll take two-thirds of this stuff out of the hampers and dump it into that rain-water barrel, then we'll get into the hampers ourselves and lie snug. The lay brothers will load the hampers on the burro and we'll have a free ride to the monastery and be carried inside the walls. What do you think of that?'"

"You've got a great head, Bob. I wouldn't mind trying the trick on if I believed it would work."

"There's no great harm in making the attempt. If we're caught we can get out of the scrape by making good the damage."

"That would make a hole in our pocketbooks, and we need the money if we're going to travel through Sonora."

"But if we succeed, and I feel it in my bones that we will, think of the rattling adventure we'll have. We'd have the advantage of seeing the inside of a monastery that is closed to all strangers. It would be something to talk about when we got back home."

"We might not be able to get out of the monastery after we got in, not to mention what we might be up against if the monks caught us, as they probably would."

"Why, they're holy men, aren't they? They wouldn't harm a hair of our heads. They might not like our invasion, but I don't suppose they have any secrets they are afraid of leaking out."

"You can't tell what's behind those old gray walls, built a hundred or more years ago. They must have some special reason for keeping strangers at a distance."

"Oh, it's just one of their rules. Well, are you game to do it?"

"If you're willing to take chances I am," replied Tom.

"We're not taking many chances. Most of the monks are away now, and we shall probably have only three or four of the lay brothers to buck against. No doubt we can get one of them to show us around after we get inside, and then let us out by a side gate before the monks get back."

"All right, old man, heave ahead."

Tom seized a good-sized fowl and threw it into the water-butt. Bob relieved his hamper of a similar bird. They worked rapidly, now that they had embarked in the hairbrained adventure, and within ten minutes had emptied enough of the contents of the hampers to permit of their getting inside and putting the covers on.

"It's lucky Pepita has been detained inside, or we never could have worked this dodge," said Tom. "When she comes out presently she'll wonder where we have disappeared to, as she won't see us on the road to either the village or the monastery."

"We'll have the laugh on her when we get back, as you say she told you that we couldn't get in there," said Bob getting into his hamper.

"She'll think the American boys beat the world for nerve and daring," replied Tom, clambering into the other hamper.

"They certainly do. Hello! There are two chaps coming up the road from the village. They look like lay brothers. Get out of sight and don't make a move."

The boys pulled in their heads, and, adjusting the covers so as to have a little ventilation, they remained as quiet as two bugs in a rug. As the lay brothers came up Pepita made her appearance at the door. She was surprised to see that the two boys were gone. She looked up and down the road, but saw no signs of them.

A look of disappointment rested on her pretty face, for she had counted on another talk with Tom Hammond before he and his friend returned to Magdalena on the railway.

"Are the hampers all ready, senorita?" asked one of the lay brothers in an humble tone, as he stepped up.

"They have been ready this hour, good brother," replied the girl respectfully.

"Get the burro, Brother Bruno, and we will proceed on our way," said the lay attache of the monastery. "We are already late. We must hurry in order to get back before the good monks return by the short route."

"Now, by our patron saint, but this hamper is plaguey heavy, Brother Anson," said Brother Bruno, as he and his companion lifted the one in which Tom Hammond was hidden to place it in the sling on the left side of the burro.

"It is, Brother Bruno," admitted the other. "It must carry a load of prime poultry this time, and plenty of wine, for such were the orders we left here to be filed."

"No doubt, brother, no doubt," replied Brother Bruno. "Now the other, and then we're off."

The other hamper was equally as weighty as its companion, and the two men chuckled over the anticipated feast all hands would have of its contents.

Both hampers being well secured on the burro,

the lay brothers bowed to the senorita and took up their march for the monastery, both walking beside the animal's head, and talking in a low tone.

CHAPTER III.—Prying Into the Mysterious.

All things considered, the boys enjoyed their ride from the inn up the mountain side pretty well, as they had put back all the straw to protect the wine bottles under them and make them a soft seat to rest on. The only unpleasant part of the trip was the heat of the sun, which warmed up the crocks and made their quarters uncomfortably close.

They secured ventilation by holding up the covers an inch or so with their fingers, so that on the whole they got on fairly well. At length the lay brothers reached the monastery gate with the burro and the hampers. Brother Bruno drew a horn from his pocket and sounded it. In a few minutes a wicket in the gate opened and a rough-looking face appeared in the opening.

A moment afterward the big gate swung open and the brothers led the animal into a kind of courtyard, while the man who had opened the gate closed it. The hampers were deposited before a door at the side of the building, and the burro was taken to a small stable. The boys simultaneously and cautiously lifted the covers to take a peep at their surroundings. They found themselves looking into each other's faces a couple of feet apart.

"We've arrived," said Bob with a grin.

"That's what we have," responded Tom. "We're in the courtyard."

"The coast seems clear. Shall we get out?"

"Not yet. Let the lay brothers carry us inside. You see, we've been deposited near a door. They'll be back presently to move the hampers. If they found them suddenly turned light weight it would arouse their suspicion, naturally. They would examine the inside, and find a lot of nothingness instead of fat chickens and other provender. Then there would be something doing, and we might catch it where the turkey did the axe. Hist! They're coming back. Get out of sight," said Tom.

Brother Bruno unlocked the door, and he and Brother Anson, seizing the hamper that contained Tom, carried it inside to the storeroom of the monastery, where they left it beside several empty hampers. As soon as their backs were turned Tom raised the cover and watched them go out into a passage.

"This seems to be the storeroom," he thought, looking around. "I think I'll get out of my close quarters and hide behind one of these other hampers."

He suited the action to the thought, and was hardly out of sight when the lay brothers entered with the second hamper, which they put down near the other. Then they left the room locking the door after them. Bob lifted the cover and looked out.

Tom saw him by the light of an old-fashioned lamp which hung from the ceiling. He decided not to show himself for a few minutes, and see what his companion would do. Bob stood up in

his hamper, reached over and lifted the cover off the other.

"Here, get out, Tom! Are you asleep?" he said.

Tom chuckled from his place of concealment. As there was no movement in the hamper, Bob looked into it and discovered that Tom was not there.

"Where in thunder is he?" he muttered, springing out on the stone floor.

He looked around the room, but could see nothing of his friend.

"Great jawbones! Maybe—no, that couldn't be. He must be in here somewhere. I'll bet the lobster is hiding from me. Here, Tom, come out, wherever you are. I'm on to your tricks."

Tom saw that the joke was at an end, so he showed himself.

"Funny boy!" growled Bob. "Thought you'd scare me, did you? Thought I'd believe I was in here all alone. Huh! I wasn't born yesterday. Now, what are we to do first? Get out of here, I suppose. This is only the store-room, and there is nothing to see here that's interesting."

"Come on, then," said Tom. "Hold on a moment. What's that on yonder shelf?"

They went to the shelf and found a pair of loaded revolvers.

"What do monks need revolvers for?" said Bob in some surprise.

"If you'll tell me, I'll tell you," replied Tom. "I think we'd better take them. As we're in this place without authority, we might be roughly handled by the monks when they discover us, as I'm afraid they are bound to, unless we're able to protect ourselves."

"A good idea," said Bob. "You take one and I'll take the other. We can leave them at the inn when we get back, to be returned with our compliments."

Accordingly the boys each thrust a revolver into their pockets and then turned to the door. They were staggered when they found it locked.

"We're locked in!" said Tom, with a blank look.

"Good gracious!" replied Bob. "Is that so? What are we going to do now?"

"What can we do until somebody comes and lets us out?"

"This is a dickens of a note. We'll be bundled out of the monastery and won't be able to see a thing after all the trouble we've taken to get in."

"Can't be helped. It is simply hard luck."

"Maybe there's another way of getting out."

"I doubt it."

"Let's see, at any rate."

They examined the walls, but couldn't find any other means of entrance or exit.

"We're up against it, all right," said Bob, as they stood in a corner opposite the door. "Here we'll have to stay until—what's that?"

His foot had come into contact with an obstruction which on examination, proved to be the iron ring at one end of a trap-door.

"A trap-door. This must lead somewhere," said Tom, examining it.

"Of course it leads somewhere. Maybe to some dungeon cell."

"What would monks want a dungeon cell for?"

"Maybe it was used a long time ago, when the place was first built, to punish some monk who

broke his vows and went wrong. Lots of queer things were done in the olden times, before people were as civilized as they are now."

"Let's see where it leads to," said Tom, stooping and seizing the ring.

The trap yielded readily to a pull, opening up on a pair of hinges. Flashing a match down the hole, they saw a flight of narrow, circular stone steps leading down into pitch darkness. The idea of penetrating that place did not strike either Tom or Bob as inviting.

"Puts me in mind of stories I've read about the underground passages in the old medieval castles on the Rhine and elsewhere," said Bob.

"It looks rather cobwebby and mysterious down there, doesn't it?" responded his companion.

"I should remark. And a strong, dank smell comes out of it. I don't know that I've got the nerve to tackle it."

"Not if I go first?"

"Oh, if you go down, I sha'n't hold back."

"How is your match safe?"

"Full."

"So is mine, so come on. Hold on, I'll go down a bit and you let the trap down. I want to see if we can push it up easily from underneath."

The experiment was tried, and Tom found that he could open the trap from beneath without any trouble. That fact being settled, they started down the stone steps, Bob pulling the trap down over his head. Tom counted fifty steps as he advanced, striking a fresh match when the previous one went out, and then he faced a tunnel-like passage. They advanced along the passage for perhaps a dozen feet, when they came to a grated door.

"I wonder where this leads to?" said Bob.

The door was locked, but a huge iron key projected from the keyhole. Tom turned it and pulled the door toward him. The odor that reached their noses was decidedly unpleasant.

"Shut the door and let's sneak," said Bob. "Lord! That smell is enough to knock a horse down."

Tom was about to do so in a hurry when suddenly a hollow groan struck upon their ears. It clearly came from the room, and sounded most unearthly.

"That settles it! Me for the storeroom as fast as I can reach it," said Bob.

"Hold on, Bob. There's some one in here who seems to be in a bad way," said Tom, whose nerve held out under the trying circumstances. "Don't run away. Let's investigate."

He struck another match as he spoke and flashed it into the small cell. The sight they saw made them start back aghast.

CHAPTER IV.—The Secret of Claim No. 7.

Upon a moldy bed of straw lay the ghastly wreck of what had once been a stalwart man. To the eye he was a mere skeleton. His eyes, sunk deeply in their sockets, burned like live coals. His garments were mere tattered remnants of the clothes he had once worn.

"Great Scott!" cried Tom. "This is awful!"

Bob tried to say something, but his tongue refused to wag. As Tom struck a third match he saw a lantern standing near the door. Picking

it up, he saw there was a piece of candle in it, and he eagerly jumped at the chance to secure a steady illumination. The unfortunate specimen of humanity looked with surprise on their features and forms revealed by the light.

"Who—are—you?" he asked in hollow tones.

He spoke in the English language.

"Two American boys," replied Tom. "Who are you, and how come you here and in this horrible state?"

"How—came—you—here?" he replied, ignoring the boy's questions.

"Oh, we just dropped into this old monastery to look around," answered Tom.

"The—ban-dits—where—are—they?"

"Bandits!" exclaimed Tom. "What bandits? I don't know of any."

"The — villains — who — pre-tend — to — be — monks."

"You don't mean the Black Brotherhood?" cried Tom, looking at Bob in some consternation.

"Yes. They—are—not—monks—but—a—gang—of—ban-dits. I am—their—victim—. For—months—I know—not—how—many—per-haps—years — they — have — kept — me — here — a prisoner."

"Why did they do this?"

"To — learn — the — se-cret — of — Claim — Seven."

"The secret of Claim Seven!"

"Yes."

"What is Claim Seven?"

"The—richest—mine—in—the—moun-tains."

"Gee! Is that so?"

The man uttered a hollow groan.

"Tom, we'll have to get out of this den of thieves, which we thought was the monastery of an order known as the Black Brotherhood, and get help to save this poor old man," said Bob.

"It—is—too—late—to—save—me," said the man. "I have—been—dying—for—a—long—time — and — an — hour — or — two — will — fin-ish—me. You—boys—shall—be—my—heirs. To — you — I — will — give — the — secret — of — Claim — Seven. It — will — make — you — for — there — is — a — for-tune — in — gold — in — it. Mark — you — the — third — stone — from — the — bottom — in — yon-der this is a pipe dream or not," said Tom.

— corner? Remove — it."

"Hold the lantern, Bob, and I will see whether He laid hold of the stone and found no trouble in pulling it out.

"Shove the lantern this way," he said.

The light revealed a small, thin memorandum book underneath where the stone had rested.

"Is this what you mean?" asked Tom, holding it up before the man.

"Yes. Guard—it—well—and—read—what—is—writ-ten—in—it," he answered, with increasing difficulty.

Tom shoved it into his pocket.

"Now — go — and — may — Heaven — pre-serve — you — both," said the man.

"But we can't leave you in this hole," said Tom.

"Go—go," said the man eagerly. "I will—be—dead—before—ah!"

His head rolled to one side, and his jaw dropped.

"He is dead," cried Bob. "He went like the snuffing out of a candle."

"Thank goodness he is out of his misery! And now we had better get out of this place as soon as we can. Lord! To think we're in a nest of bandits instead of a monastery of pious monks. No wonder sight-seeing strangers are not admitted to this place, unless, perhaps, they are known to have money or jewelry enough about them to tempt the rascals to put them out of the way. As we have learned the secret of the place, we may be lucky if we escape with our lives."

"Don't mention it! You give me the shivers! This is the time we have put our feet into it. It's lucky we found those revolvers. We will be able to defend ourselves if driven to a corner," said Bob.

"Well, we'll lock the door and take the keys away. It will be a fitting tomb to the poor chap, and the rascals when they come down here to visit him again won't be able to get at his bones," said Tom, taking the lantern.

They stepped outside the cell, and then Tom shut the door, locked it, and removed the key. With the lantern to light the way their return to the storeroom was rapid, and glad enough they were to get back. Nothing had happened while they were away as far as they could judge from the looks of things. Tom closed the trap and blew out the light of the lantern.

"Those bogus lay brothers haven't come back to get the contents of the hampers yet," said Bob, looking into one of them, and observing that the straw had not been disturbed. "How surprised they'll be when they find them three-quarters empty."

"They'll be sure to suspect the cause, and knowing that this room has been locked since they left the hampers they'll hunt around in here till they find us," replied Tom. "Now I've an idea to throw them off the scent."

"What is it?"

"We'll take the wine bottles out of the hampers and then fill them up with all the old rubbish we can find in this place. That ought to make the hampers as weighty as when they arrived here, and the lay brothers will not suspect that they brought two curious American boys into this alleged monastery."

"That's a prime scheme. Let's get busy," agreed Bob.

It had one advantage—it afforded them occupation. It took them about half an hour to complete the job. They packed the straw nicely in at the top, juts as they had originally found it at the inn before they conceived their daring project of entering the monastery.

"Those lay brothers will be treated to a surprise of their lives," chuckled Bob, as they put the covers on the hampers.

"Maybe it won't be they, but others, who will make the discovery," replied Tom.

"They'll hear about it, and it's likely they'll catch thunder for not bringing the supplies."

"I'm afraid Pepita's father is the one who will get in trouble over the matter."

"What do we care? Let them fight it out among themselves. The innkeeper will find the chickens and other stuff in his rain-water barrel, so he won't lose anything in the end, though he will, no doubt, be greatly puzzled to account for them being there. Do you think the girl

will suspect us as being at the bottom of the trick?"

"If she does she won't say anything," said Tom confidently.

"Say, if one man comes in here to get the contents of the hampers, don't you think that the best thing we could do would be to surprise him, give him a tap on the scone to prevent him giving the alarm, and then drop him down the trap?"

"Yes. We'll have to do something like that in order to get out of here. Now that we know that we're in a nest of bandits, masquerading as monks of the Black Brotherhood, we need have no compunction about knocking any of the chaps on the head, or putting a ball into their bodies, for that is likely to be our own fate if we're captured. I am afraid the gang is back by this time after their fake procession. We'll have to be mighty cautious after we get out of this storeroom."

"That's right. By the way, doesn't it strike you as strange that the real character of these pretended monks hasn't leaked out?"

"It does seem strange when you come to think of it. Probably they owe their immunity from discovery to the fact that they show themselves very seldom."

"There must have been a real Order of the Black Brotherhood, and these bandits have stepped into their shoes. Perhaps they even murdered the monks in order to get possession of the monastery, and take refuge under the reputation of the order," said Bob.

"It wouldn't surprise me to learn that what you have suggested is the truth. If we get away from here alive it will be up to us to expose the cheat, and have the scoundrels exterminated."

At that very moment they heard the rattle of a key in the lock of the door, and they hastened to conceal themselves.

CHAPTER V.—Exploring the Monastery.

The door opened and two men, who appeared to be connected with the culinary department of the monastery, entered the storeroom. They went directly to one of the hampers, took off the cover, and began pulling out the straw.

"There'll be something doing in a moment," whispered Bob.

After the straw was out one of the men reached in and drew out a canvas-covered ham which the boys had found hanging from a nail and used to help fill the hamper. He looked at it in surprise and uttered an ejaculation in Spanish.

"Bruno and Anson were not told to get smoked ham," he said.

"Well, never mind, comrade, as long as they brought plenty of good fowl we will forgive them the ham," replied the other, reaching down and fishing out, instead of the chicken he expected, a grindstone the boys had taken from a shelf.

"El Demonio! What is this?" cried the astonished man.

"A grindstone!" ejaculated his amazed companion. "What is it doing in this hamper?"

"Bruno and Anson will have to answer for this. It is one of their jokes, no doubt."

The speaker reached down into the hamper again. This time he fished up a small bag with three empty bottles in it.

"Carramba! What is the meaning of this?"

"Por Dios! If this is a joke it is a poor one," said his companion.

"Let us look into the other."

They did, and their astonishment and rage was great on discovering that it, too, was full of a miscellaneous collection of odds and ends, most of which they recognized as belonging to the storeroom. They swore like troopers and vowed that Bruno and Anson should pay dearly for the trick. In their opinion Bruno and Anson had emptied the hampers, hidden the contents and substituted the stuff they had found.

"It is growing late, and this nonsense will delay dinner. You, comrade, hunt up either Bruno or Anson and bring him here. In the meantime I will look around to see where the right contents of the hampers are hidden," said the chap who seemed to be the head cook, and whose name was Antonio.

His companion hurried away and Antonio began nosing around. The boys saw that they were sure to be discovered, so they resolved to take the bull by the horns before the man's associate returned with Bruno or Anson. As Antonio came within a foot or two of them, Tom rose up suddenly and struck him a blow on the head with the butt of the revolver he carried. The bandit cook fell without a cry and lay like a dog on the floor.

"Dump him into one of these empty hampers," said Tom, "and then we'll be off."

This was speedily accomplished, and the boys glided out of the storeroom into a long passage.

"Say, Tom, let us hide in this niche and wait for those chaps to enter the storeroom. As soon as they are in we'll close the door on them and lock them in. That will reduce the enemy by two more," said Bob.

Tom thought the idea a good one, so they took refuge in the niche and waited. Presently they heard footsteps echoing in the distance, a door opened and then slammed, and voices of two men in angry conversation reached their ears. The men entered the passage, went toward the open door of the storeroom and walked in. Tom immediately slipped off his shoes and ran over to the door.

Antonio's associate was showing the dumb-founded Bruno the various articles that he and the head cook had pulled out of the two hampers brought from the inn, and jabbering out his opinion of what he considered a mighty poor practical joke. Tom took advantage of their backs being turned to shut and lock the door on them. Then removing the key he rejoined Bob and put on his shoes.

"Which way shall we go?" asked Bob.

"Follow me," replied Tom.

He led off down the passage, which terminated in a wide corridor. There were doors at each end of the corridor. The boys went to one of these doors. Opening it cautiously a little way, Tom looked out on the courtyard. He shut it quickly, for he had seen half a dozen hard-looking chaps attired in monkish habits, but with the

cowls thrown back on their shoulders, within a couple of yards of the door. The rays of the declining sun lighted up their grizzled countenances, and showed villainy written on every line.

Tom dragged Bob away toward the other end of the corridor, telling him what he had seen. The door here was locked, but as the key was in it the boys had no difficulty in letting themselves out on a wide platform surrounded by a low, thick wall. Looking over the wall, they perceived that there was no escape in this direction, for below them was a deep rocky ravine that ran into the depths of the range, with never a foothold for a human being to make his way down. Above them soared the three stories of the rear wall of the monastery, with a score or more of narrow windows overlooking the landscape.

"Our chances of escape do not look very good," said Bob glumly.

"While there's life there's hope," replied Tom cheerfully.

"The wall begins yonder at the end of the building. If we could reach that we might have some show," said Bob.

"If we each had a pair of wings we might reach it," answered Tom. "Come, we will go inside again and see if luck will befriend us."

There were doors right and left off the corridor. Tom opened the first on the right and saw it was the refractory or dining-room of the monastery. A long table set with plates, cups and saucers, knives and forks, and other articles, occupied the center of the room. They did not waste the time to count the plates, but had they done so they would have seen that places were provided for thirty persons.

There were no chairs in the room, long benches on either side of the table doing duty for them. There were several religious paintings on the walls, but otherwise the apartment was severely simple. Trying the door on the opposite side of the corridor, the boys looked in on what had been the chapel of the place when the building was occupied by the monks of the Black Brotherhood.

A whitewashed stone altar stood at the far end, but there wasn't a single article of church property on it. Instead it had been converted into a kind of sideboard for flagons, and jugs, and bottle of wine and other liquor. There were a number of rude and time-worn benches here scattered about at random. The boys rightly concluded that this was the carousing room of the bandits.

So far they had been very fortunate in not running across any of the rascals who had converted this religious establishment to their own sacrilegious uses. Seeing a narrow door on either side of the altar, Tom led the way toward them. The first he tried was locked and the key was missing, the other one yielded to his touch. They passed into a small ante-chamber whence a spiral staircase of stone led upward.

"Come on, Bob, we might as well see where this leads to," said Tom, running up the steps.

The flight ended at a narrow landing facing a door. The door was not locked, and they entered a room, furnished with a couch, a rude chair, and half a dozen pegs driven into the wall. From these pegs hung various articles of

coarse clothing, including a Panama straw, a soft cowboy hat, and a sombrero. On the floor was a pair of long boots with spurs attached to the heels, a heavy Mexican saddle, from the holster of which protruded the butts of two heavy revolvers.

"Here is more armament," said Bob. "We'd better take these shooters. We can't be too well armed in this den of iniquity."

Tom agreed with him, and they took possession of the weapons.

"We have twelve shots apiece now," said Bob. "We ought to be able to make Rome howl in case we are held up."

They stepped to the narrow window that afforded light to the room, and looked out. The view they obtained was a wild and romantic one, with the peaks of the Sierra de Antunez glowing in the last rays of the sinking sun. It was all very charming in its way, but was of no advantage to the young American lads looking for a means of egress from the old monastery that had stood the storms and sunshine of three hundred years.

There was a second very narrow door in one of the inner walls of the room. It was locked, but as the key was in it they quickly glided into a narrow passage which took them to another door at the end of a dozen yards.

"What a building for different kinds of passages," remarked Bob.

The door opened on a fairly wide corridor of some length. Numerous doors opened off it. The boys soon became convinced that these had been the sleeping-rooms of the monks, for the half dozen they inspected, and which they judged were a fair sample of all, were furnished alike with an iron cot and pegs driven into the wall.

They were little better than cells, with a narrow window each overlooking either the ravine or the courtyard. Midway of the corridor was a break. One side was a flight of stone steps leading toward to a floor above, and on the other was a similar flight leading downward.

"No use going up any higher," said Bob, "for there are no fire escapes by which we could descend on the outside."

"Neither is it safe to go down, for I hear voices and footsteps in the corridor below," replied Tom.

"What shall we do? Hide up here till it gets dark and then try and make a sneak for it?"

"That is just what I was going to suggest."

"Where shall we hide? In one of these little rooms?"

"It might be better to go up to the next story and hide there. Maybe that is not occupied by the bandits."

"Go ahead, then, and I'll follow."

So up they went to the landing above. Here they found another corridor running the length of the building, with several doors leading off of it. Having nothing better to engage their attention, and not believing there was any one at all on this floor, the boys proceeded to inspect the rooms.

The rooms were of different sizes, and from their appearance seemed to have been used by the monks as workrooms. The bandits had cleaned them out of whatever they could make use of, but did not use them apparently for any purpose.

At the end of the corridor they came to a locked door.

The key was in the lock, however, so Tom turned it and walked inside, followed by Bob. They stopped with exclamations of surprise. The room was occupied by a lovely-looking girl, who sat beside the narrow window with her hands clasped in her lap, and her tear-dimmed eyes watching the tip sun's yellow disk as it slowly sank out of sight in the far-off horizon.

CHAPTER VI.—The Two Prisoners.

The fair occupant of the room, who was evidently a prisoner, turned her head with an exclamation. As he gaze rested on the boys the look of fear in her eyes changed to one of surprise. She looked like an American, so Tom, who was in the lead, addressed her in English as he advanced.

"Don't be frightened, miss. You appear to be a prisoner here, so you can count on us as friends," he said.

"Did you learn that I and my father were prisoners in the hands of the dreadful men who live in this monastery, and have come to save us?" she asked eagerly.

"No, we have discovered your presence here by accident. You say that your father is a prisoner, too? In one of the rooms on this floor?"

"In the next room. We are being held for a ransom, and threatened with death if it is not sent. How comes it you are here and not prisoners?" she asked, with a doubtful look in her eyes. "Are the robbers away?"

"No; I wish they were. It would not then be a difficult matter for us to make our escape."

"Ah! You have been prisoners and managed to get out of the place in which you were confined—is that it?"

"No, that isn't it. We simply made fools of ourselves and came voluntarily into this bandit nest, thinking it was occupied by the monks of the Black Brotherhood."

"That is how we were taken prisoners. We heard a great deal about this monastery during our tour of this country, and as I was anxious to see such an old religious building, my father decided to gratify my curiosity, so we came to Sonora from Chihuahua, and three days ago we rode out here on horseback from Magdalena."

"That is the town where we heard about this monastery," said Tom. "The landlord of the inn where we stopped last night said so much about it that we made up our minds to come out here this morning. We did so. We stopped to rest at the inn on this side of the village. There the daughter of the landlord told us we must not come here, as strangers were never admitted. In fact, she made a remark that ought to have impressed me, and that was that nobody who ventured to visit this place ever returned from it. I asked her why, and she replied that, struck by the holiness of the monastery, they became monks themselves."

Tom then went on to recount how they had secured admission to the place.

"That was a tom-fool trick, and we are getting paid up for it," he said. "However, if our com-

ing here proves the means of restoring you and your father to freedom, it won't be such a bad trick after all."

"How can you do that?" she asked anxiously.

"That has to be considered. We came up to this floor to hide until it was dark, and then we intended to make a dash to get outside the wall. I suppose we shall carry that programme out, only we will take you and your father with us."

"You haven't told me your name," she said, after a short pause.

"My name is Tom Hammond, and this is my friend, Bob Gillette. What is your name, miss?"

"Dora Ardsley. My father is Henry Ardsley, president of the Western National Bank of St. Louis."

"You say he is a prisoner in the next room?"

"Yes, and he must be dreadfully worried about me."

"Bob, go and see if you can get into the next room. If you can, bring Mr. Ardsley in here, and we will consider a plan for our joint escape."

Bob left the room and returned in a few minutes with the girl's father. Dora rushed into his arms with a cry of joy.

"You'd better go down the corridor and stand watch, Bob, so that we may not be surprised by the bandits. While you are on guard we will arrange some plan for making our escape," said Tom.

Bob left the room, and then Tom gave Mr. Ardsley a rapid outline of the brief trip that he and his companion had paid to Mexico, and the serious adventure which had been the outcome of it.

"Well, my boy, your coming to this place has been a godsend to us, for, locked in these rooms as we were, we could not possibly have had a chance to make our escape. As matters stand now, it is by no means certain that we can get away, for I counted at least thirty men in the bandit band, and probably they are all, or at any rate most of them, in this building at this moment. That makes the odds largely against us, and only by strategy can we hope to succeed."

"Strategy assisted by our revolvers."

"Are you armed, then?"

"We are pretty well provided in that line, as we found two pair of six-shooters since we came here. Here, take this revolver. One will probably be as much as I can use to advantage. Can you shoot, Miss Ardsley?"

"I shall be willing to try in my own defense," she replied with a smile.

"Then take this weapon, and when you shoot, shoot to hit. I will get one of my companion's revolvers. Thus the four of us will be in a position to make things interesting for the rascals," said Tom.

Tom then said that the best plan would be to wait till the bandits were in the eating-room at their dinner, and then they might count of the coats being fairly clear for them to make a break for the courtyard and try to escape by the main gate before the rascals could cut them off.

"That is an excellent plan, provided we can secure the key to open the gate," replied Mr. Ardsley. "If we fail to do that we won't be

able to get away unless we can find means of scaling the wall in a hurry."

"I counted on finding the key in the lock of the gate," said Tom.

Then you have figured wrong, for there seems to be a man who has charge of the opening and closing of the gate. He probably carries the key."

"That will make a whole lot of difference," said Tom with a look of disappointment. "When you were brought in with your daughter did you notice a ladder or anything about the courtyard that would help us scale the wall?"

"I did not. As far as I remember the courtyard seemed perfectly clear."

At that point Bob made his appearance.

"There has been a great hubbub downstairs ever since I went out to watch," he said. "I wouldn't be surprised if it's about those chaps we locked up in the storeroom, for I heard a heavy banging, as if they were trying to break in the door, and finally a crash as if they'd succeeded. As we were not detected in the act they are sure to believe that some of their own people did the business, either as a joke or for some other reason. The failure of their supplies to reach here is also likely to make some difference in their feeding arrangements, and I guess the bunch are in a pretty bad humor over the matter."

As he spoke they heard a great racket in the courtyard, in which were mingled the cries of a man. It was now nearly dark, and the cause of the tumult could not be made out through the small window that afforded light and air to the room.

Somebody, however, appeared to be getting rated, and Tom and Bob surmised it was one of the two men whose errand to the inn and village had been to fetch the necessary supplies. The row stopped after a few minutes, but the voices of many of the men could be heard in angry tones.

"By the way, do they feed you regularly?" said Tom to Mr. Ardsley.

"Yes, they have treated us fairly well as far as food goes," answered the gentleman.

"Then it is probable that one or two of them may be up here soon with your evening meal," said the boy. "In order to avoid precipitating trouble, I think you had better return to your room, Mr. Ardsley. We will turn the key on you both as we found you, and conceal ourselves close by. After the men have left you we will unlock your doors again."

"I agree that that is a prudent suggestion," replied the banker.

"Seeing that there is likely to be trouble in getting out by the gate, I think we'll have to postpone our departure until the bandits have turned in for the night," said Tom.

"They don't go to bed till all hours," said Mr. Ardsley. "I have heard them shouting and singing somewhere on the ground floor long after midnight."

"Well, get into your room now. Bob and I will try to find an avenue of escape. You must not be impatient, either of you, if you don't hear from us for some time."

The banker kissed his daughter tenderly and followed the boys into the corridor. Tom locked them both in, leaving the keys in the locks as

he had found them, then the boys went to the landing at the head of the stairs to listen for the expected coming of a bandit or two with the night meal for the prisoners.

CHAPTER VII.—A Dash for Freedom.

Half an hour passed, during which Tom and Bob sat on the top step and conversed in whispers, and then steps were heard coming up the stairs from the ground floor.

"Hist! I think someone is coming up here," said Tom.

"There's more than one. Sounds like two men. There, you hear one talking to the other. I knew there were two of them," returned Bob.

"They are probably coming up here, so we'd better hide."

Accordingly the boys retired to the room opposite the one occupied by Dora Ardsley. As it was quite dark now, they left the door ajar so they could look out. They heard the steps ascending the top flight, and soon saw the faint flash of a light. The light grew brighter as the men approached that end of the corridor. At length the men came into view. The one in advance was a stalwart, sunburned chap with a dark mustache and a rather wicked look. He carried a lamp in one hand and a small tray of food balanced in the other. He didn't look at all like a Mexican or Spaniard, but rather greatly resembled one of the tough characters of the mining districts of our wild and woolly West.

His companion, a man with many of his own characteristics, appeared to be an American, too. He also carried a lamp and a tray of food. The man with the mustache entered Dora's room and the other went into the room occupied by her father. They shut the doors after them, and so the boys had no means of knowing what they said to the prisoners. However, that didn't greatly matter as far as they were concerned. The man who entered Mr. Ardsley's quarters soon came out without the tray or the lamp, and, after locking the door, went downstairs. The other remained so long in Dora's room that Tom grew impatient.

He began to fear that the rascal was bothering the girl with his rude attentions, taking advantage of her apparently helpless condition. Suddenly a shrill scream from Dora awakened the echoes of the night. That was more than Tom could stand. He rushed across the corridor, threw open the door, and saw the girl struggling in the rascal's embrace. He dashed to her assistance. The scoundrel turned at the sound of his steps and saw him. With an ejaculation of surprise he released Dora and turned to confront the boy.

"Who in thunder are you?" he cried in English. "And how did you get here?"

"No matter how I got here, or who I am, you are my prisoner," replied Tom, leveling his revolver at him.

"Your prisoner!" answered the ruffian, with a sneering laugh, not at all intimidated by the pointed weapon. "I rather guess you're mine."

With that he made a spring at Tom and grabbed the wrist that held the revolver. Tom did not try to shoot, as he didn't care to raise an alarm. He struck out with his left fist and land-

ed on the rascal's face. With a string of imprecations he seized the boy with his other arm, and Tom would have had little show with the stalwart scoundrel had not Bob, who was watching at the door, rushed in and dealt the man a stunning blow on the head with the butt of his weapon. The ruffian dropped senseless on the floor.

"That settles his hash," said Bob.

"For the time being," said Tom. "We must gag and bind him so that he won't be able to raise an alarm when he recovers his senses."

He took the blanket off the couch that had been provided for Dora to sleep on, tore a portion of it into strips and tied the man hand and foot. Then he gagged him with another strip.

"Take the tray into the room across the corridor, Bob," he said. "I'll follow with the lamp. Come, Miss Ardsley."

He locked the rascal in and removed the key.

"Better eat your supper now," he said to the girl. "I see you haven't touched it. I suppose the rascal annoyed you with his attentions."

"He tried to make love to me," she replied, with flushed face. "I begged him to go away. He said he would if I would kiss him. Of course I wouldn't do anything of the kind. Then he said he would kiss me himself. He grabbed me, I screamed, and then you came in and saved me. I am very grateful to you for doing so," and she favored Tom with a look that set his blood tingling, for she was a very pretty and winsome girl.

"It is fortunate we were at hand to be of assistance to you. Go and let Mr. Ardsley out of his room, Bob."

His companion did so, and the banker joined them. He was quite nervous about his daughter, for he had heard her scream, but was somewhat reassured when he heard Tom's voice addressing the bandit. Dora was too nervous and excited to eat anything, so, rather than let the food go to waste, Tom and Bob, who were pretty hungry themselves, cleaned the plates between them. Telling Mr. Ardsley and his daughter to remain in the room, Tom and Bob adjourned to the head of the stairs, where they took up their position once more to keep watch so that none of the bandits could come on them or their new acquaintances unawares. An hour passed, and nobody came upstairs. A sound of revelry came up from the ground floor, and the boys concluded that the bandits were carousing in the room where the altar was.

"This would be a good chance for us to slip out if they are all in that room," said Tom; "but they may be lounging around the main corridor as well, in which case they would be bound to see us as we made our exit through the door at the foot of the stairs."

"If it wasn't that we had the young lady to protect I would be game for taking the chances," replied Bob.

"I would chance it anyway if I thought we could get through the gate."

"Hadn't we better go down and see how the land lies?" suggested Bob fifteen minutes later.

"Yes, I guess we may venture," replied Tom.

They removed their shoes and slipped down the dark stairways like two shadows. The main corridor was deserted, all the bandits being in the carousing room, talking and singing in a loud key.

"The coast is clear. Go up, Bob, and fetch Mr.

Ardsley and his daughter down and we'll get out into the courtyard. Tell the old gentleman to remove his shoes and carry his daughter in his arms," said Tom.

Bob disappeared upstairs. While he was away Tom slipped over to the door and tried it. It was not locked. He returned to the staircase, and waited impatiently for Bob and the others to appear, which they did inside of ten minutes. As the corridor still remained untenanted, Tom and Bob, with drawn revolvers, walked to the door, followed by the banker and Dora. They passed out into the open air and closed the door behind them. Then they started for the wall. It was not a dark night, as the sky was brilliant with stars, though there was no moon. Tom judged it best not to go toward the gate, at least direct, lest they be observed by some bandit who might be on the watch. They reached the wall without an alarm being given.

It was a pretty tall and thick one, but there were many places where the smaller stones had fallen out, and these interstices offered a foothold for an expert climber. The boys, after surveying it, did not doubt that they could get over it if not interfered with, but the question was how to get the girl up to the top. Finally Tom told Bob to climb up as an experiment. In five minutes he was astride of the wall. Then Tom told Mr. Ardsley that they must try and push Dora up high enough for Bob to reach her hands, when it would be possible, he judged, with his companion's assistance, for her to scramble up the rest of the way. It was a new and rather embarrassing experience for the girl to undertake, but as it seemed to be the only way of escape she consented to try it.

So Tom and the banker lifted her up by degrees, telling her to make use of the holes in the walls to place her boots and her fingers. It was a task of great difficulty, and all hands were very nervous lest they be detected. Bob, reaching down as far as he could and still maintain a firm hold on the wall, finally caught her hands and raised her up by degrees until he got her on top. Mr. Ardsley followed, and Bob aided him, too. With only the agile Tom to follow, their success seemed assured. At that thrilling moment one of the bandits, the door tender, in fact, appeared on the scene and spied them. He yanked out his revolver and fired a shot at them, the bullet whistling by Bob's head, causing him to duck his head involuntarily.

"Quick, Tom! Up with you, or you'll be nabbed!" cried Bob, as the man came running toward them, shooting as he ran.

Fortunately his rapid movements did not improve his aim, and a shot from the banker's weapon winged him, more by good luck than otherwise. As Tom came scrambling up as fast as he could, Bob and Mr. Ardsley both gave him a hand, and he was soon on the top of the wall.

"Drop over on the other side, Mr. Ardsley, and catch your daughter as we lower her to you, then cut down that road toward the inn as fast as you can go. We'll try and keep these rascals at bay long enough to give you a good start."

The banker didn't lose a moment in getting down, and his daughter was soon in his arms. As they started off down the road on a run the bandits came pouring out of the building.

CHAPTER VIII.—In a Trap and Out.

They saw the figures of the boys astride of the wall, and at first they had an idea they were part of the gang. The only prisoners they had, barring the poor old wreck that lay dead in his underground vault, were the banker and his daughter, whom they were holding for ransom, and they considered them safely caged on the top floor of the monastery. Therefore they could not understand that anyone was trying to get away over the wall, but their impression was that their identity had leaked out, and that the Mexican authorities were at their gate with a demand for their surrender. This idea was dissipated by the wounded gateman, who ran up and told them that a man and a girl, resembling their prisoners, assisted by two strange boys, were making their escape over the wall. This delay on their part gave the banker and his daughter time to get out of sight and secure a good start for the inn. As soon as Tom saw they had disappeared in the distance he said:

"Now we'll skip, Bob, but instead of following our new friends, and thus drawing the bandits in their direction, we'll start up the mountain. The bandits will follow us, and as we're pretty active we ought to be able to give them the slip, and hide somewhere till daylight, when we can make for Magdalena by another route, where we will doubtless meet Mr. Ardsley and his daughter at the inn."

As the boys started to go down on the other side of the wall, the bandits gave a shout and rushed for the gate, discharging several shots at the boys. Tom and Bob heard the whistle of the bullets as they ducked over the wall and dropped to the ground.

"If it were only a dark night now, we'd be all right," said Bob, as they darted off up the mountain.

"But it happens that it isn't," replied Tom. "However, there's no moon, and that's some advantage."

It was light enough for the bandits to see them when they poured out of the gate, and the rascals followed as hard as they could go, firing their weapons on the chance of hitting the fugitives. The chance, however, was slight, and so the race continued over ground that gave the rascals the advantage because they were familiar with it, while the boys were not. The boys, being fleet of foot and full of animal spirits, did not anticipate being overhauled, but they soon had reason to alter their opinion, as the dozen or more scoundrels dogged them with a persistency that showed they did not mean to let them escape if they could help it.

If they, and the two prisoners whom the rascals believed were with them, got away, their secret would be out, and the monastery would no longer be the safe hiding place for them it had been for several years past. The leader of the band was not with them, because he was bound and gagged in the room on the third floor of the monastery where Tom had left him locked in. Tom did not know it was the redoubtable head of the band whom he, with Bob's help, had overthrown, nor did the ruffians themselves know that their captain was in trouble.

He was a Western desperado, named Dave

Hamlin, who had drifted to Mexico some years before, because his crimes had made his old stamping grounds too hot for him. Two companions, as bad as himself, had followed him, and they had collected a crowd of villainous Mexicans around them, and the whole outfit, under Hamlin's leadership, terrorized northern Mexico for a hundred miles around, and defied all efforts of the government to exterminate them.

During a raid into Sonora, Hamlin conceived what he and his companions considered a brilliant idea. That was to take possession of the monastery of the Black Brotherhood and pose as the monk, whose faces were always hidden under their cowls when they appeared in public. To carry this plan out it was, of course, necessary to get rid of the monks. Hamlin found an easy and effectual way of doing this. There were several abandoned mines in the Sierra de Antunez range. After surprising the religious men one day in their monastery and making them prisoners, he marched them into a particularly inaccessible part of the mountains and shut them up in the mine which had its outlet there.

He took care, however, to strip them of their coarse distinctive black outer garments, for it was necessary, in order to keep up appearances, to maintain the monkish attire when occasion called for it. Thenceforth the band of rascals always appeared in the clerical grab of the Black Brotherhood, except when engaged in their lawless business. Thus their presence in the monastery on the slope of the Sierra de Antunez mountains was never suspected. When pursued, as they often were, by the Mexican police, they retreated to their sanctuary, and so disappeared as if by magic from the officers of justice, who hunted the range over and over again for their retreat without success. It was from the clutches of a dozen at least of this gang that Tom and Bob fled further and further into the mountains that eventful night, and only that luck befriended them at a timely moment the boys would have been captured, and capture, under the circumstances, would have meant death, swift and certain.

"I'm afraid our name is Mud," said Tom, as he and his companion, exhausted by the hard flight they had been put to, looked around for some place in which to make a desperate stand against the ruffians who were closing in around them on almost every side.

The round tip of the full moon was just rising in the distance, and its silvery rays would presently reveal their whereabouts to the vengeful rascals who had cornered them in a kind of cul de sac, or quarry-like indentation in the range, from which there appeared to be no outlet.

"Looks like it," admitted Bob despondently. "This is where they've got us dead, and I suppose they know it."

"If they don't know it they will soon. Inside of ten minutes the moon will make this spot as clear as day almost. They're beating around in the bushes only a short distance away. You can hear them to the right and the left as well as in front."

"Well, we've got six shots apiece with which to defend ourselves. If we can't escape some of them will never live to gloat over our capture," said Bob, with a tense ring in his tones. "I shall fight to the last gasp."

"That's all we can do, Bob, old chap. There's no telling what our fate might be if we were taken alive. They might stick us down in that dungeon where we saw the old man die and abandon us to starvation as they did him. Death by a bullet is far preferable to such an end as that," replied Tom.

"I should say so."

"And that reminds me of the old man's book containing the secret of Claim Seven. He gave up his life sooner than reveal the location of the mine, probably guessing that they would put him out of the way anyhow. He told me with his latest breath to guard it well, meaning I must not let it fall into the hands of those villains. Well, I must hide it in some fissure of these rocks so it will not be found on me when the end has come."

As there was no time to be lost, Tom set about doing it while Bob kept watch for the appearance of the bandits. Looking around for a suitable receptacle in which to place the book where it would defy discovery even in broad daylight, Tom saw a small hole in the face of the rock above his head. He stepped on a smooth, round stone in order to reach it. His weight caused the stone to slip and roll from under him. Losing his balance unexpectedly, he fell sideways into a clump of bushes, through which he shot with a smothered cry like a pantomime imp through a stage trap, landing on a bunch of some soft material a dozen or more feet underground, and in the midst of intense darkness. Bob saw his plunge, and rushed over to the bushes when his companion failed to scramble to his feet. The bushes had closed in over Tom's head, concealing the hole completely, and so Bob was astonished to see no sign of him.

"My gracious! Where did Tom vanish to?" he said to himself. "He fell right into these bushes, and yet he ain't here at all. Tom, Tom! Where are you?"

No reply came to his low hail.

"He must have been stunned, and yet if he was I should see him. I don't see any hole where he could have fallen in. This is the most myste——"

He took another step forward as he spoke. The bushes yielded under his weight, as they had under Tom, and down he sank below the surface like a shot, fetching up alongside his missing companion. At the very moment he disappeared several of the bandits appeared at the opening of the cul de sac, and two or three more came out on the ridge which formed its sides and back. The moon, rising higher, threw a broad shaft of light into it, illuminating the greater part of it.

"We've got 'em trapped at last!" cried a smooth-faced Mexican, rushing forward with his cocked revolver, expecting to see the boys, as well as their late prisoners, crouching down somewhere in the semi-circular spot. His companions pressed eagerly forward behind him, while those above looked down to see the finale of the long chase. To the surprise and disappointment of the rascals there was no sign of their quarry anywhere.

"Carramba! They did not come in here after all, but gave us the slip somewhere outside!" grieved the Mexican who led the pursuit.

"Por Dios! Did I not see them come in here?" growled one of his companions.

"If you did they would be here."

"They may be hidin' behind them bushes."

Three of the ruffians raised their revolvers and fired into the patch of bushes, and then dashed forward, stopping on the edge and parting the shrubbery with their arms. Had they stepped into the midst of it they would have been treated to the same surprise experienced by Tom and Bob; but they did not, for they could see that the bushes did not shelter those they were in search of. After a hurried consultation the bandits left the place, and, dividing into two parties, hurried off up the mountains in two directions.

CHAPTER IX.—The Autobiography of a Dead Man.

"Oh, Lord! Where am I at?" ejaculated Bob, when he landed on the yielding mass of material at the bottom of the hole.

"Hello, Bob! I see you have joined me," replied a voice at his elbow.

"Is that you, Tom?"

"Who else? Didn't you see me vanish through the bushes, and haven't you followed me?"

"I have for fair, but I didn't do it of my own accord. I stepped into that hole above while looking to see where you had disappeared to and came down so quick that it almost took my breath away."

"Hist! I hear those rascals up there. They are looking for us."

"Lord! I hope they won't follow us down here."

"This hole seems pretty big at this end. Let's move back, so if one of them should fall through he won't land on our heads."

They groped their way a few yards from the bottom of the hole, and then stopped, for in the darkness they feared they might tumble into some pit. After waiting in some trepidation for one of the bandits to come shooting down into that pit of darkness in the same way they had come, and no such awkward and unwelcome intrusion happening, they began to breathe easier.

"I guess we're not going to have a visitor, after all," said Tom.

"I hope you don't feel disappointed," growled Bob.

"Not in the least. This is an instance where two are company and three or more an unpleasant crowd. I guess it's safe to strike a match and see where we are and how we're going to get out when we think it time to make the attempt."

Tom fished a match out of the little safe he always carried around with him, for though he didn't have much use for them himself, somebody always was asking him for a match to light a pipe or a cigar, and he liked to be accommodating. Under the present circumstances a safe full of matches came in mighty handy. Tom struck one, and when the light flashed up the boy saw that they were in a hole about a dozen feet square, one side of which was solid rock, while the others were a mixture of rock and dirt. Nearly in the centre of this excavation they saw the dark hole through which they had made their involuntary descent. In the solid rock was another hole, which looked like the mouth of a tunnel. That they were not the only persons who had been in that was evident from the presence of a lantern with a piece of candle in it.

"A lantern!" cried Bob. "We're in luck."

Tom thought so, too, for he lost no time in lighting it. The dull gleam it shed made the place more cheerful, though it showed them the almost utter impossibility of returning to the surface by the route of the hole.

"How are we going to make our escape from this hole?" asked Bob, with a glum look. "This is almost as bad as being confined in that monastery vault."

"The person who brought this lantern here must have got out, or else his dead body would be in evidence. I judge that tunnel yonder must lead somewhere."

"I should imagine it led into the mountain range, and I don't think we are likely to escape that way. The man who brought the lantern was probably lowered down and hauled up again by companions on the outside."

"Why should he leave the lantern behind him in that case?"

"I'm not a fortune teller, so I can't answer your conundrum."

The boys tried to think of some way by which they could return to the cul de sac above via the perpendicular hole, but they couldn't figure it out.

"I'm afraid this is our finish," said Bob gloomily.

"Oh, I don't know," replied Tom with a cheerfulness that he did not actually feel. "We were lucky enough to get out of that bandit nest with our scalps, and help Mr. Ardsley and his daughter to freedom as well, why should our luck go back on us now that we've given our pursuers the slip?"

"People can't be lucky all the time."

"Well, I don't feel as if I was going to turn up my toes yet a while, and I take that as a favorable omen."

"What are you going to do?"

"Try the tunnel route and see where it will lead us to—that is, after we get rested. I'm pretty much fagged out by that chase up the mountains, and I should think you would be, too."

"You can bet your life I am."

"Seeing that it's just as cheap to sit down as to stand, here goes," and Tom threw himself at full length on the ground.

Bob did likewise, with the lamp between them.

"While we're doing nothing I'm going to take a peep at the dead man's book and see what the secret of Claim Seven amounts to," said Tom, pulling the memorandum book out of his pocket.

Drawing the lantern to him, and raising himself on one elbow, Tom opened the book.

"The old man was a pretty fair writer," he said. "I wonder if he put down what's in this book while he was a prisoner in that vault? He must have had a light to write by."

"We found a lantern in his cell."

"I suppose he filled this book up just to keep his mind occupied," said Tom, running the numbered leaves over with his fingers.

"Very likely. Let's hear what he says about this secret mining claim, though it isn't likely to do us any good from the way things look at this moment."

"It would be a fine thing if, after we got out of here, we discovered a rich gold mine. We'd be made for life."

"I'd give my chances of it to be back in Magdalena in the same bunk I occupied last night."

"Perhaps I would, too, if I told the truth. However, I'll read you a bit of this. What do you suppose he called it?"

"The Secret of Claim Seven."

"No, the title is rather creepy. He called it the 'Autobiography of a Dead Man.'"

"He must have known that his goose was cooked when he wrote it."

"So it would seem. Listen: 'I, John Boland—'

"His name was John Boland, eh?"

"Must have been if he says so himself. 'I, John Boland, of Dundee, New York, fifty-three years of age, a prospector by occupation, being a prisoner in the hands of a bandit band, whose leader is Dave Hamlin, an Arizona desperado, and face to face with certain death in an underground vault of the monastery of the Order of the Black Brotherhood, now in possession of the said bandits, who are masquerading in the garb of the said order, the members of which they have probably murdered, for not a single one of them is on the premises, do hereby write down the facts concerning my capture, and the reason why I am the victim of a horrible fate.'

"So the leader of the bandits is an American named Dave Hamlin," said Bob. "If we are so fortunate as to get away from this place we'll avenge John Boland's death by putting the authorities up to the fraud that is hidden within the monastery's walls."

"If we don't do it Mr. Ardsley will, so we may calculate that the bandit gang will have to abandon their snap and take to the wilds, or else stand a siege that would end in their capture," said Tom.

"Go on with that autobiography."

Tom accordingly proceeded. Boland gave a brief sketch of his life from the time he left Dundee after his wife's death to the day when he accidentally discovered the secret of Claim No. 7.

He stated that many years since an old peon accidentally discovered gold in the Sierra de Antunez mountains. As soon as the news spread a rush was made by a number of people to secure claims in the favored district. Twelve claims were staked out in the mountainside, and work was begun on all of them. Shafts were sunk in some places and tunnels bored in others. More or less gold was found in all the mines, but finally all petered out and became dead ones but Claim No. 7. For several years this mine yielded a rich revenue to its fortunate owners. There were three of them, and after a time two of the three sold out to the third, and for many months he worked it alone, making a rich harvest.

The possession of so much wealth finally turned his brain. One day he disappeared, and though a long search was made for him he was never found. Strange to say, soon afterward the rich golden vein which had made the claim famous gave out abruptly, and after many attempts to relocate it the mine was abandoned as a dead one.

Years passed, and John Boland came to the Sierra de Antunez on a prospecting tour. He spent many weeks to no purpose, and was on the point of going elsewhere when a curious accident which happened to him resulted in a most astonishing discovery in connection with Claim No. 7.

"One afternoon," the manuscript went on, "I wandered into a kind of cul de sac in the moun-

tains. While making a survey of it I stepped into a bunch of bushes, and the next moment I shot down through a hole and landed in a sort of underground room about twelve feet square."

"What's that?" cried Bob in a tone of interest.

"The description answers to this place," replied Tom, now intensely interested himself. "Listen: 'Unable to return to the surface by the way I had come, I hunted around for an outlet, feeling that if I failed to find such a thing that I should die of starvation. Alas! Better had such been my fate, than the refined tortures which have since fallen to my lot. As I groped my way about I suddenly found myself at the mouth of what appeared to be a tunnel. I followed it. It led me down through the mountain for a long distance to what appeared to be an old disused mine. While seeking to make my way out to the open air I walked into a roomy section of the mine that appeared to have no outlet save that through which I had entered. I trod on something that flared up with a snap. It was a match. I picked it up while it was still aglow and found myself close beside a table on which stood a lantern with a partly consumed candle in it.'"

"Say, this is getting decidedly interesting," said Bob.

"I managed to light the lantern at the expense of a scorched finger, and then proceeded to survey the room." went on Tom, reading from the book. "On a bunk in the corner I saw the moldering remains of a man whose identity was disclosed by certain documents on the table to be Senor Antonio Diaz, the missing owner of Claim No. 7. In the opposite corner I beheld numerous bags of pure gold quartz worth a small fortune. From the senor's diary I learned that he himself had obtained all this gold from the mine, which was Claim No. 7, by cutting into the vein of ore at a certain point ahead of the spot where the miners were working. It was evidently a crazy freak on his part. His diary showed that as soon as he heard the miners approaching the point where he had been surreptitiously working, chiefly at night, for many weeks, he immediately sealed up the continuation of the vein in such a way as to indicate that the lode stopped at that point. His scheme succeeded, and the mine was soon after abandoned as having petered out."

Boland then went on to say that after much difficulty he managed to find his way to the main part of the mine, and so out into the air, with a valuable secret in his possession which he intended to avail himself of. He at once hunted up the heirs of Senor Antonio Diaz and bought the claim as it stood for a song. Then he looked around for a man he could trust to help him remove the bags of quartz. Unfortunately, his selection fell upon a smooth-tongued chap who was acting as a spy for the bandit band while posing as an honest man.

Boland, however, was too prudent to tell his new associate where the bags of quartz were hidden in the depths of Claim No. 7, but he told enough to give the rascal the idea that he had discovered the place where the vein which had given out started anew. Finding that Boland only intended to use him to assist in removing sundry bags of the ore which he presumed the

prospector had dug out himself, and would not confide the secret location of the vein itself, he communicated with the bandit leader, and Dave Hamlin decided to capture Boland and wring the secret from him.

Accordingly the prospector was taken prisoner on his way to the mine with his traitorous companion in a wagon. Boland then detailed all the artifices and threats employed by the bandit leader to make him give up the secret, and how on his persistent refusal he was finally entombed in the vault in the foundation of the monastery. Here he was told he would be kept until he revealed the location of the gild vein in Claim No. 7. Believing that the bandit would not release him even if he made the required confession, he determined to go to his death with the secret in his possession.

On the day he found that one of the stones in the vault was loose, and could easily be worked out. For several days he amused himself in prying it loose. Then he decided to write this statement of his case in a memorandum book he had in his possession, with a lead pencil he had, and hide it in the cavity under the loose stone, believing that some time in the future it would be found by somebody deserving of the good luck it pointed the way to.

Boland wound up his autobiography, as he called it, with a close description of the cul de sac in the mountain, showing how, by descending through the hole and following the tunnel, a person could reach the room in Claim No. 7 where the bags of rich gold ore were concealed. The body of the dead Senor Antonio Diaz he had buried in one of the holse of the mine, and he explained how the person who reached the mine via the cul de sac route could find their way out by the main entrance, and could afterward return by the same way if they took particular care to note the guiding marks he had made on the rocks and walls.

On the last page Boland, after stating that the papers showing his title to Claim No. 7 were deposited in the Magdalena Bank, willed all his rights to the property to the person into whose possession the memorandum book fell. He signed it with his full name, and at the bottom added:

"And may the good Lord have mercy on my soul. Amen."

"That's all," said Tom, closing the book and looking at his companion. "What do you think about it, Bob?"

"I think it is a wonderful yarn."

"The tunnel seems to point the way for us to get out of this place."

"Then we'd better lose no time in following it, for I can't reach the open air any too quick," replied Bob, springing to his feet.

CHAPTER X.—Claim No. 7

With the lantern in his hand, Tom led the way into the tunnel, which looked as if it had once upon a time, ages before, perhaps, been a natural water course, for it was undoubtedly the work of nature, and not of man. As they proceeded they found it varied in height and width, but was always large enough for them to proceed in an upright position, though they fre-

quently had to bend their heads to avoid contact with some stone projecting from the roof. Its trend was continuously downward, sometimes at a gentle angle, and at other places an abrupt descent that called for a certain amount of caution.

"As Boland came down here, the first time, at least, without a light, he must have made much slower progress than we are doing," said Tom, after they had gone several hundred yards into the bowels of the range.

"I'll bet he did. And I should say it would take a whole lot of nerve to penetrate this tunnel without knowing how one is going to come out in the end," replied Bob.

"A person will take 'most any kind of a risk when his life is at stake," said Tom. "Boland saw he could not return to the surface by way of the hole through which he entered in the same accidental manner we did, and the tunnel offered the only possible avenue of escape from his predicament. If it ended in a blank wall somewhere in the depths he could not be much worse off than in the hole we have just left. At any rate, he could return the way he came. Even if this memorandum book had not referred to this place I intended to follow the tunnel on a bare chance that it would lead us to the open air."

"It seems a most remarkable circumstance that we should tumble into the very place that the book speaks about, doesn't it?"

"It certainly does."

"Even with the description of the locality for a guide, we might have hunted the mountain range over for weeks before we would have found the cul de sac, as he calls it."

"That's right," nodded Tom.

"It will be great if we find those bags of gold quartz which Boland says represent a small fortune."

"I bet you. Finding them is one thing, but getting them away is another."

"We'll have to go to Magdalena and hire a team."

"But we'll need protection. Those bandits might come on us unawares and gobble us up with the quartz, too."

"I'm thinking that the bandits will have all they can attend to in trying to avoid being gobbled up themselves by the police whom we shall put on their track."

"It is probable that the authorities will send a detachment of soldiers to round them up. It is hard for us to say what the police amount to in this country. We haven't seen any of them so far."

"It makes no difference to us whether soldiers or police are sent out after the rascals, as long as they are captured. I dare say they'll all be hanged for putting the monks out of the way."

"I wonder what they did with those poor chaps? I should think there must have been thirty or forty of them in the monastery when the bandits captured them. It seems terrible to think of such a wholesale butchery."

"Those villains haven't any conscience. Is there anything worse than the cruel fate they meted out to John Boland?" said Bob.

"Maybe there are other vaults in the monastery where the dead bodies of the monks will be found when the place is thoroughly searched," said Tom.

"I wouldn't be surprised. No doubt the whole bunch was shut up and allowed to starve to death. Don't speak any more about it. It gives me the shivers."

The tunnel had as many curves as a snake. Sometimes it made abrupt turns, almost at right angles, but as a rule when it deviated from a straight course the turn was a roundish one.

"I wonder how far down into the mountain we are now?" asked Bob, after they had gone on for some time.

"You know as much about the matter as I do," replied Tom.

"I should imagine it was about time we reached the mine."

"We may only be half way there, or not even that."

"Oh, Lord! Don't say that. I'm sick of this."

"Brace up. We've got plenty of time. It's just one o'clock by my watch."

"Is that all? I thought it was three or four."

"Just think what a story we'll have to tell when we get back home."

"When we get back; but remember we're not out of this blamed tunnel yet."

"We'll get out by following the directions given by Boland in the book."

"I hope so; but suppose we get mixed up in his directions, or something has blocked up the road since he was here—what then?"

"Don't be pessimistic, Bob. Always look on the bright side of things, and you are sure to feel ever so much better."

Bob made no answer, and they jogged on a while in silence.

"How is the light? Do you think it will last?" asked Bob at length.

"It will last an hour yet, I guess."

"And if we're not out of the mountain by that time we'll be in a nice fix!"

"Not any worse than Boland the first time he came here."

"But Boland was a prospector and miner, and accustomed to underground places."

"Oh, we ought to reach Claim No. 7 some time before the light goes out."

"What we ought to do and what we will do are two differ—"

"Cut it out, Bob. Your talk is enough to give one the nightmare."

Another spell of silence followed, during which they made considerable progress along the monotonous tunnel.

"If we find our way blocked and have to go back it will take us a year," said Bob, who couldn't keep silent long.

Tom didn't answer him. He had no idea that they would have to go back, and in any case it wouldn't do them any good to go back, for the hole they had left above was like an old-fashioned rat-trap—very easy to get into, but practically impossible to get out of. He had the utmost confidence in Boland's directions, and felt assured that it was only a matter of time before they would see daylight around them again. At any rate, his attention was fully occupied in watching the ground ahead of him, and that prevented him from harboring gloomy thoughts like his companion, who had nothing to do but tag on after him.

"Say, why don't you say something?" said Bob, after another short silence.

"Because I've got nothing to say," replied Tom. "You might talk to keep a fellow from having the mulligrubs."

"Why don't you think about those bags of gold quartz we expect to find when we reach the mine?"

"Because I ain't sure we'll find them. It seems too good to be true."

"We'll find them, don't you worry. Boland said they were in a certain part of the mine, and as he saw them they must be there."

"I guess it's a long time since he saw them. The bandits must have searched the mine for them as well as for the lost lode. If they found the bags that will be the end of them as far as we are concerned."

"I'll gamble on it they didn't find the bags. They're lying in the mine waiting for us to come along."

"I wish we'd reach that blamed Claim No. 7. Seems to me we've been long enough in this tunnel to walk from the Harlem River to the Battery."

"You're dreaming, Bob. We've only been forty minutes in the tunnel. I've been keeping tab on the time with my watch."

"It has seemed like two hours, at least."

"What are you going to do with your share of the quartz after it's turned into money?" asked Tom, trying to divert Bob's thoughts.

"I never count my chickens before they're hatched."

"But suppose your chickens were hatched?"

"Well, I'd suggest that we should buy an automobile, if we could find a good one down here, and tour the country in it."

"That would be a good plan. I think I would be willing to join you if the roads were good enough."

"After that I'd be in favor of buying a yacht, or some other small vessel, and sailing back to New York instead of returning the way we came."

"That isn't a bad scheme, either. Though, on the whole, I think I'd prefer to return by the way of St. Louis."

"Why St. Louis?"

"I'd like to see Miss Ardsley and her father again in case we should not meet them before they leave this country."

"Ho! I see how the land lies," chuckled Bob. "You're mashed on that girl."

"Nonsense! How could I be mashed on her when I've only seen her once, and under rather strenuous circumstances?"

"Once is enough where a girl is as pretty as she is."

"Oh, she isn't the only pretty girl in the world. There's Pepita, for instance. I think you called her a peach."

"She is. I think she's all to the mustard. I wish I could speak Spanish."

"If you could you'd go back to the inn and make love to her, I suppose?" laughed Tom.

"I wouldn't mind doing it if you didn't butt in."

"You are welcome to her. I don't want her."

"You wouldn't say that if you hadn't met Miss Ardsley."

"Never mind about Miss—hello! I guess we've come to the end of the tunnel at last," said Tom in an animated tone.

"Have we? Hooray!" cried Bob excitedly.

A few steps farther on carried them into a

rough-looking cavern, the floor of which resembled the rocky bed of a stream that had run dry.

"Now, let's see how we shall proceed," said Tom, stopping and consulting the directions furnished by John Boland. "On reaching the rocky opening at the end of the tunnel," he read, "turn to the left till you hit a narrow passage, which follow, and it will take you direct to the room where the bags of quartz are standing. There you will find fresh candles, matches and a sack of sundry provisions. By this time everything but the canned meats and the two flasks of whisky are rotted away."

They turned to the left, picking their way over the stones, and finally reached the narrow passage.

"Now for the room where the bags of quartz are stored," said Tom, once more leading the way.

"And where we shall find fresh candles, which I think as much of as the quartz, because it would give me the horrors in the dark down here," said Bob.

The passage was a tortuous one, but not long.

They soon came into the rocky cavern that Boland referred to as a room.

Advancing into the place with the lantern held above his head, Tom gazed around, and Bob did likewise.

There was a small table and a chair in the center.

On the former stood a lantern a fresh candle in it, and beside it several candles and a box of matches.

On the chair lay the provision bag.

In one corner stood a dozen or fifteen small bags full of what the boys knew must be the gold quartz referred to by Boland.

One of them was open at the top, and it took but a glance to show the boys that it was the richest quartz they had ever seen.

"That should pan out many thousands of dollars to the ton," said Bob, who, because his father was a mining man, prided himself on his general knowledge of mining matters.

"I'll bet it will. Boland says there is a small fortune in those bags alone. There is a greater fortune for us in the lode which Boland says he found and marked with a cross."

"No doubt of that, if we are allowed to take possession of Claim No. 7 and work it."

"We won't do anything about that till we have a consultation with your father. If the matter can be arranged he will fix it up. At any rate, we hold the secret of its existence, and it isn't likely anybody else will be able to get at it."

"I'll light the other lantern," said Bob, "and then we'll try to get out of here by the marked route described by the prospector."

"Let's take a look at the provisions. If there is anything worth eating I want a bit, for I'm as hungry as a hunter," said Tom.

Emptying the bag of its contents they found a dozen cans marked "Corned Beef" and "Roast Beef," each bearing the label of a noted Chicago establishment.

There were also the two flasks of whisky, quart size, mentioned by Boland.

Tom found a can opener in the bag and opened one of the tins of roast beef.

The meat appeared to be perfectly good, so the boys ate it all up between them.

"That tasted good, but it would have gone bet-

ter if we had had some bread or crackers," said Bob.

Tom agreed with him, and then referring to their directions again, pointed out the way they were to proceed in order to reach the main part of the mine.

CHAPTER XI.—Back at the Inn.

The route they were to follow was not easy to keep track of. They found themselves continually running against the blank wall where there appeared to be no outlet.

How Bowland had ever got out of the maze in the dark, and without the guiding marks the boys had the advantage of, was a mystery to them.

"It was just luck," said Bob, and Tom guessed it was.

They were out of their real troubles and in the mine proper some little time before they became aware of the fact.

Finally, when Tom's watch pointed to the hour of five they saw an opening right ahead of them, and walking out of it found themselves in a small ravine with the starry heavens above their heads.

"Glory hallelujah!" cried Bob in great glee. "We're out of the blamed mountain at last. I never was so glad of anything in all my life."

They rather enjoyed the wild solitude and perfect silence of the place, and for several minutes neither spoke.

"I suppose Mr. Ardsley and his daughter have been snoozing away these six or seven hours," remarked Bob.

"I'm afraid our failure to appear there has given them the idea that we were captured by the bandits," replied Tom.

"I wouldn't be surprised. We did have a narrow squeak of it."

"That hole in the ground saved our bacon at the critical moment."

"Bet your life it did. We probably would have been dead ones in a short time if we hadn't disappeared from the cul de sac."

"It's my idea that when we didn't turn up by midnight Mr. Ardsley hunted up a team to take him and Miss Dora on to Magdalena, in order to notify the authorities of the true state of affairs at the monastery, informing them that we are probably held prisoners by the band, and urging immediate steps to be taken for the capture of the rascals and our rescue. If I am right, the bandits will soon have to fight for their lives if they have not taken time by the forelock and abandoned the place."

"They will probably retreat into these mountains, so we will have to keep our eyes skinned in making our way out."

"Day is beginning to break. Let's go down the ravine and see how things look from there. There appears to be a good road through here, made, of course, by the people who worked the twelve claims in this neighborhood. The road ought to take us straight to civilization."

The boys walked to the end of the ravine, passing the six abandoned mines in that direction, and then they saw that they were close to the foot of the range. They saw that the road terminated at a small wharf on the bank of a river that ran northward. Evidently the ore taken out

of Claim No. 7 and the other mines had been transported to its destination by water. The boys walked down to the wharf and saw that it was fast going to ruin. Underneath it Bob observed a large rowboat, partly full of water.

Tom stood and looked at the boat reflectively.

"That's a good-sized boat," he said. "Do you know I have an idea."

"What is it?"

"I was thinking it would be just the thing for us to carry away those bags of gold ore in."

"I guess it would answer first rate for that purpose, now that you mention it. But where could we carry the stuff to? We don't know what river this is, nor where it leads to."

"I thought you knew that the only river around this part of the country is the Santa Cruz, which runs straight up into Arizona."

"You're right. I forgot about it. Then your plan is to carry that ore up the river into Arizona?"

"I was figuring the matter in my mind."

"It would be a pretty long pull."

"Yes. It is probably close on to 100 miles to the border line by the river. That would take us all of four days, I should judge, taking things easy. Then it would take us all of another day to go to Rawlins, on the Southern Pacific, which has several smelters. In fact, we must calculate that it would take us the best part of a week to carry that ore from here to Rawlins," said Tom.

"And how long is it going to take us to get it out of that inner cavern?" said Bob. "It was no fool of a job for us to find our way out without anything. We'd have to make at least a dozen trips back and forth, for we couldn't carry more than one bag of the ore at a time between us. It would take us the whole day, working hard, even if we were lucky enough to get through in that time."

"Even so, it's worth it, isn't it?"

"Yes, it's worth it, all right; but we couldn't do much today, for I'm about fagged out. I feel like turning in somewhere now and having a good eight hours' sleep. I should think you would, too."

"Oh, brace up! Can't you stand a little hardship?"

"Why, we've been on our feet since early yesterday morning. Do you take me for a horse?"

"You haven't had any harder time of it than I have."

"I didn't say I had. I should think you'd feel it as much as I do. I'm for returning to the mine, hunting up a soft spot where we're not likely to be surprised by the bandits, and taking a good, solid rest."

"I have a better plan than that."

"Let's hear it."

"We'll turn to and get that boat from under the wharf, dump the water out of it, and row down the river to a point somewhere near the inn. Then we'll tie it up, go to the inn, and turn into a good bed. When we wake up we can sit down to a decent meal, and at the same time enjoy a bit of Pepita's society. We will also be able to learn if Mr. Ardsley and his daughter reached the inn all right last evening, and afterward went on to Magdalena. We will find out, too, whether anything has yet been done about cleaning out bandits. Then, after putting in the night at the inn we'll turn out to-morrow morning as fresh as

two daisies ready to come back here and attend to business. We'll need a week's supply of provisions to see us up the river, and we can buy all we want at the inn and fetch it up in the boat. Do you know of any better plan than that?"

"No, I don't. It's all right, and I'm with you. I'm willing to do 'most anything for the chance of getting into a real bed," said Bob, brightening up.

"Then we'll start right in and carry it out."

It was now daylight, but they couldn't see a human being in sight. They turned to, hauled the boat out from under the wharf, got the water out of it, and getting aboard shoved off the shore and headed down the stream. After pulling pretty steadily for a couple of hours they caught a distant view of the monastery on the slope of the Sierra de Antunez range. They judged that the inn wasn't more than two or three miles off from the river, so they hauled in to the shore, moored the boat in a secluded spot, took the bearings of the place, and started off across the unoccupied country at a smart walk. It was an hour before they came in sight of the inn, squatting drowsily beside the road in the sunshine. Another fifteen minutes brought them to the door, and the first person they saw on entering the public room was Pepita, busy at some household duty. She uttered an exclamation of surprise on beholding them.

"Buenos dias, senorita" (Good morning, miss), said Tom, raising his hat to her.

"Why, Senor Hammond, this is a great surprise to me," Pepita replied in Spanish, "and you don't know how glad I am to see you and your friend back again."

"You aren't any gladder than we are to get here, after what we've been through since we left here yesterday afternoon for the monastery yonder."

"We've heard a dreadful story about that place from an American senor and his daughter, who reached here last evening. We—my father and myself—could not believe it at first, for it seemed incredible that the monks of the Black Brotherhood should turn out to be bandits and not the religious men we have always supposed them to be."

"The real monks were no doubt murdered by the bandits when the rascals took possession of the monastery. When that event happened I have not the least idea, but it must have been two or three years ago. Since then the bandits have hoodwinked the people around here by representing themselves as the real monks of the monastery. They must have done the trick well to evade the discovery of their true character."

"The American senor and his daughter told us they had been prisoners at the monastery for four days, and that it was through the help of you and your friend, who had in some way secured entrance into the place, that they were enabled to escape. They said that you came away with them, but when you and your friend did not follow them here last night they appeared to be much distressed, and said they feared you had been captured by the bandits while covering their retreat."

"No, we were not captured, else we would not be here now talking to you," replied Tom. "We were pursued up the mountains for a long distance, and that accounts for our not reaching the inn until his hour."

Pepita's father now appeared on the scene, and he expressed his surprise on seeing the two boys who were supposed to be in the hands of the bandits of the monastery. He told them that Mr. Ardsley, after waiting two hours for them to appear, had secured his team and gone on to Magdalena as fast as possible to notify the authorities of that town of the state of affairs at the monastery, and he (the landlord) was looking for a squad of mounted troopers to appear at any moment to investigate the situation. A light breakfast was hastily prepared for Tom and Bob. After they had partaken of it they went to the room placed at their disposal, turned in and were soon asleep.

CHAPTER XII.—The Attack on the Bandit Band.

The boys were dead to the world for the rest of the day, and were utterly oblivious of the fact that a strong party of mounted troopers had passed the inn about noon and made straight for the gate of the monastery. The gate was found to be locked, and no attention was paid to their demands for admission. The troopers then prepared to get over the wall. No sooner was this move put into effect than the invaders were met by a sudden and well-directed fire from a barricade that had been erected in front of the main entrance to the monastery, and from all the windows of the third floor bearing on the scene of action. The attack of the troopers was repulsed with considerable loss on their part, and their commander, feeling that his force was not strong enough to capture the place, withdrew his men to the shelter of a near-by wood, and proceeded to invest the bandits' citadel with a view of cutting off any attempt they might make to escape, after which he sent a messenger post haste to Magdalena for reinforcements, and his dead and wounded to the inn. A desultory fire was kept up by the bandits at intervals, and occasionally answered by the troopers when any of the enemy exposed themselves. Such was the state of affairs when Tom and Bob came downstairs with a good appetite for dinner about five o'clock. Pepita told Tom all that had happened so far.

"They're a pretty nervy bunch to hold out against the soldiers," said Bob, after Tom had translated to him the girl's explanation of what had happened at the monastery.

"That monastery, with its thick walls, and high surroundings wall, is as good as a fort. It can only be attacked from two sides, as the entire rear is protected by the ravine, and from that point the building is inaccessible. With a good supply of provisions those scoundrels may be able to stand quite a siege."

"Not if the troopers brought up one good piece of artillery. That would batter their citadel about their heads, and soon make the monastery untenable for the bandits," replied Bob.

"I guess you're right; but it seems a shame to destroy such an ancient building, which is one of the landmarks of old Mexico."

"Well, it isn't our funeral whatever the troopers do. It is up to them now to exterminate a band that has given the country a whole lot of trouble in the last two or three years. I reckon

they'll do it, even if they have to raze the entire building to the ground."

"If they clean those rascals out it will relieve us of any danger of meeting them in the mountains when we return for those sacks of gold quartz."

"That will be an important advantage for us, so I hope not a mother's son of them escapes."

Pepita now called the boys to their dinner. Pepita was very anxious to learn how the boys had got into the monastery. The contents of the hampers which Tom and Bob had thrown into the water barrel had not been discovered, so no suspicion of the means employed by the young Americans had occurred to either the girl or her father.

"So you want to know how we got in there?" smiled Tom, as Pepita took her seat between the boys.

He then explained to Pepita how he and Bob got into the monastery and all that happened to them there, including how they found Mr. Ardsley and his daughter imprisoned on the third floor, and afterward assisted them to escape.

"You Americans are a brave smart people," said the girl with a smile.

"Bet your life we are. There are no flies on us."

"No flies on you, senor? Explain. I do not understand what you mean," said the puzzled senorita, who was not familiar with American slang.

Tom laughed.

"I guess there are no flies on you, either, Senorita Pepita.

"Ah, senor, you are making fun at me," she replied with a pout.

"I wouldn't think of doing such a thing," answered Tom, who then explained as well as he could translate the expression into Spanish the meaning of it.

"The senor is so funny," laughed the girl.

"I'm not half as funny as my friend Bob," he said.

"Are you very funny, Senor Bob?" she said in Spanish.

"What did she say, Tom?" asked his friend, looking embarrassed.

"She forgot you do not understand her language, and asked you if you didn't think it was a fine night," grinned Tom.

"Si, senorita," said Bob with a smile.

Pepita smiled roguishly at him.

"Gee! I wish I could speak Spanish!" blurted out Bob. "It's a blamed bore to sit alongside a pretty girl and not be able to converse with her."

Tom translated his words for the girl's benefit. She was pleased with Bob's reference to her as a pretty girl, and favored him with one of her most bewitching glances.

"Say, did you tell her what I said?" asked Bob.

"I did," replied Tom. "Why don't you talk to her through me? She thinks you are all right."

"I would if I thought you would tell her just what I said, and not put up any job on me."

"I'll do the right thing, honor bright," answered Tom.

So Bob ventured on a talk with Pepita, Tom acting as a faithful interpreter. The moon rose earlier that evening than the night previous, and its silvery rays brought the mountain range and

the old monastery out in bold relief. Presently the three young people heard the rapid galloping of a force of approaching horsemen from the direction of the village.

"Who have we here?" asked Bob.

"More troopers, I guess," replied Tom.

"Reinforcements, eh? Now there'll be something doing up at the monastery."

A force of fifty mounted soldiers came dashing up and halted in front of the inn. The officer in command dismounted and called or the landlord.

"That crowd, with those already on the ground, ought to be able to settle the hash of the bandits," said Tom.

"The rascals show good nerve in standing their ground and giving fight," replied Bob. "I should think they would have fled into the wilds of the mountain at the first attack, which would have given them a big advantage over the soldiers, who would have been obliged to follow them on foot, with every chance of falling into an ambush."

"Maybe they think their position so strong that they can beat the attacking party off, and so remain in possession of the monastery."

"If the Mexican soldiers are any kind of fighters they ought to be able to carry that place in short order. They're going to try it now," said Bob, pointing at the scattered bunches of dark figures that issued on foot from the shelter of the trees.

These figures made a rush for the front wall of the monastery, and were met by a succession of rifle flashes from the top of the wall. Soldiers in the rear of the attacking party opened a return fire, and the scene was lit up by frequent flashes of rifles.

"Gee! This is exciting," said Bob, as he, Tom, and Pepita watched the fight from their seats under the tree, while the landlord and his housekeeper stood in the doorway, and the two servants of the establishment looked on from the corner of the inn. Black spots were soon seen ascending the white outer wall.

"There go the soldiers into the courtyard," said Tom.

"The bandits are peppering them good from the windows," replied Bob, as the flashes increased from the windows of the second story.

"Oh, the jig will soon be up," said Tom confidently.

Five minutes later the firing ceased entirely, and after that no more shots were heard.

"They must have surrendered," said Bob.

"They may be fighting inside the monastery," answered Tom.

"That's true enough, but their name is Mud by this time."

After a while they saw a bunch of black figures rush down the slope and run over to the ravine, which they entered and were lost to sight. Other figures were seen ascending the mountain in the direction the boys had taken the night before.

"Looks as if a part of the rascals have managed to escape from the scene of combat," said Tom, "for the soldiers appear to be off in chase."

"Let's go up there and find out how things stand," suggested Bob.

"I'm with you," replied Tom promptly.

It was quite a walk, but in twenty minutes they were halted by a sentry at the gate of the monastery. Tom asked to be allowed to enter and

see the officer in charge, explaining who they were. They were permitted to pass, and made their way inside the building to the dining-room of the building, where the commander of the troopers was holding forth. Tom introduced himself and companion, and then inquired as to what had been accomplished. The officer pointed to four corpses that lay in a corner, and to three wounded bandits, and said that the rest of the band had made their escape through an underground passage that led into the ravine.

"My men are in pursuit of them, however, and I hope to capture most of them before daylight," he concluded.

His reply was rather disappointing to the boys, for they realized that three-quarters of the band had got away, and they judged that most of them stood a good chance of getting off entirely, for they did not doubt that the rascals had many places in the range where they could retreat to, and then laugh at the efforts of their pursuers to find them. This wouldn't have happened if the commander had at the start thrown a small detachment into the ravine to keep a lookout in that direction. So the boys returned to the inn, and after reporting the unsatisfactory end of the fight, went to bed and slept soundly till morning.

CHAPTER XIII.—An Encounter with the Bandits.

When they came down to breakfast Pepita told them that a small detachment of the troopers had passed an hour previous with about a dozen prisoners, some of whom were wounded, in their charge.

"Well, that's pretty good news," replied Tom. "Maybe they'll be able to run down most of those rascals after all."

"I hope so, for I believe it's settled that we are to return to Claim No. 7 this morning, and begin the transfer of those bags of ore to our boat," replied Bob.

"It's settled, all right. The presence of a few scattered bandits in the range is not going to scare us from our purpose."

After breakfast Tom interviewed Pepita's father, and arranged for the immediate cooking of several fowls, a supply of bread, and some other things that they intended taking with them. He also selected a supply of fruit. When everything was ready Tom had it packed in two wicker baskets, and the landlord agreed to send it down to their boat at the river on the back of a burro in charge of a servant when the boys were ready to start. They partook of an early lunch, and after wishing Pepita and her father good-by, they started for the stream, Pepita standing under the tree and waving her handkerchief at them as long as they were in sight. They reached the river in due time, and found their boat just as they left her. After the two baskets were put into her the servant wished them "A mas ver" (good-by), and returned with the burro the way he came, while the boys boarded their boat and Tom took the first spell at the oars as they headed up the stream.

It was two o'clock by the time they reached the dilapidated wharf. Shoving the craft under out of sight, and tying her to a spile, they started for Claim No. 7 with one of the roast fowls and a sup-

ply of bread and fruit to furnish them with a couple of meals. They made their way up the ravine over the hard road that had been built years before for hauling purposes, and soon reached the entrance to the mine. Entering, they lighted the lanterns and then proceeded to find their way back to the secret cavern by following the signs made by the dead prospector. This time they took careful note of the way, leaving additional marks that they could not mistake, and in the course of twenty minutes re-entered the cavern where the bags were stored.

"We'll first convey these bags one by one into the mine proper," said Tom. "That will be as much as we can do to-day and well up in the evening. Then to-morrow we'll carry them down to the entrance of the mine. And when we get them there we will take them down to our boat."

"That's enough for one day," said Tom, going to wash his hands at the spring.

"I should say so," returned Bob. "Our bed to-night will not be so soft as it was last night, but I guess we can put up with a little rough experience, considering what we're going to make by it."

"I should remark. We didn't think when we started on this tour that it was going to make our fortune, did we, Bob?"

"No. We shall make quite a tidy sum out of the bags of ore, but the main thing is our knowledge of the location of the lost lode. We ought to be able to lay claim to this lode without respect to the mine at all. We can say that we discovered it ourselves, and if John Boland left no heirs to enter into a dispute with us, I guess the Mexican law will recognize the justice of our right to it."

"I'm not worrying about that. We will lay the matter before your father. He, being a practical mining man, will be able to put the thing through for us."

It was close on to noon by the time they landed their fourteenth bag at the entrance of the mine.

Then they sat down and finished the chicken, and most of the bread and fruit.

"It will take us all the afternoon to get these bags down to the river," said Bob, shying a stone at a brilliantly tinted lizard lying asleep in the sunshine.

"It can't be helped if it does. We're not burros, and have got to take things easy. Now, if you've rested long enough, we'll start in."

"I hate to tackle the job, but seeing there's money in it and it's got to be done the sooner we get done with it the better."

"That's the way to talk. When one has to take a dose of bad-tasting medicine the quicker he gulps it down the sooner it's over with," said Tom.

They grabbed bag number one and started for the river with it.

"The way is down hill, that's some satisfaction," said Bob.

"I agree with you. Step out, now."

They soon found that carrying a heavy load in the hot sun, even if it was down hill, was no fool of a job.

By the time they had carried half the bags to the stream they felt ready to quit.

They stuck at it, however, taking frequent rests in the shade, and close on to sundown they landed the last one on the river bank.

"Thank goodness, the job is over! I'll remember this afternoon's work as long as I live, no matter

how much coin it puts in our pockets," said Bob, mopping his heated face.

"We've got to load them into the boat yet," said Tom.

"Oh, that isn't so much; but wait till we're cooled off a bit."

They rested for fifteen minutes, then Tom got up and pulled the boat from under the wharf.

One basket of provisions was placed in the bow and the other in the stern, and the bags were put in so as to "trim ship," as the expression is—that is, the weight was evenly distributed fore and aft, leaving two vacant spaces for the boys to sit and row.

"Now we'll eat supper if it's all the same to you," said Bob.

That suited Tom, so they got out a meat pie by way of variation, and made a meal of it, with bread and fruit.

"I guess we'd better do a good part of our rowing at night, and lie up in some shady nook during the heat of the day," said Bob.

"Your suggestion is all right, and we'll adopt it if circumstances favor it."

"The question of sleeping during our trip is another serious consideration. We can't do it in the boat, since there is no place to lie down. If we strike a village or town we can't put in there, for if we left the boat our bags of quartz would soon be stolen. I guess we'll have to sleep at different places along the stream where we are not likely to be molested."

"I don't think it would be well for both of us to sleep at the same time. One ought to keep watch while the other is sleeping. We've got a valuable cargo, and we can't afford to let any of it get away."

"Say, Tom," said Bob suddenly, "there's something moving through the bushes yonder. Whatever it is, it's heading this way."

Tom looked in the direction indicated by his companion and saw that the bushes were agitated in more than one place by the passage of some living objects.

These objects were coming toward them.

"We haven't seen any wild animals since we've been here," replied Tom, "but that isn't saying there may not be plenty. I don't like the idea of letting anything come close enough to pounce on us unawares. I guess we'd better get aboard and shove off into the stream."

Tom jumped into the boat and seized an oar to push off with as soon as Bob got in. Before the latter could make a move three hard-looking men sprang up out of the bushes and, with wild yells, started for the boat. The boys recognized the chap in advance as the bandit whom they knocked out in the room on the third floor of the monastery.

"Quick, Bob, jump in, and push off at the same time. Never mind if you do get wet. It will never do for those reascals to catch us!" cried Tom, giving the boat a shove with his oar.

Bob helped matters by pushing at the stern, wading out after the boat.

"Come back here, or it'll be worse for you!" roared Dave Hamlin, rushing into the water, followed by his two associates.

"Stand back or I'll smash you!" cried Tom in a resolute tone, flourishing the oar to cover Bob's retreat.

"Come back, d'ye hear?" shouted the bandit chief again.

"Not on your life!" replied Tom as Bob scrambled into the heavily laden boat, almost capsizing it.

Hamlin drew his revolver and fired at Tom, whose position in the boat made him an excellent mark for a bullet. Although the range was short, and Hamlin an uncommonly good shot, he missed the boy by a hair. Before he could fire again Bob yanked out his gun and blazed away. The bullet hit Hamlin in the arm, and with a roar of pain he let his weapon fall into the water. As the boat drifted away from the shore the other bandits, seeing their prey was getting away, pulled out their revolvers and began to shoot. Fortunately the falling night and the dark background beyond the boat prevented the ruffians from getting a good aim. While Bob returned the fire, Tom got out the other oar and pulled for all he was worth. It was the most exciting moment in the lives of the two boys.

CHAPTER XIV.—Working up the River.

"By George! That was a close call, Bob," he said.

"Bet your life it was. It was lucky neither of us got hit."

"They couldn't come much closer and miss than two of the bullets did in my case. We'll keep on across the river, and then it will be too dark for those rascals to make out whether we are bound up or down the river."

The bandits stood up to their waists in the water and watched them, no doubt cursing their ill luck in failing to capture the boys. Finally the boys saw their fading figures land on the bank, and then they lost sight of them. As soon as it was as dark as it was likely to be, Tom turned the boat's head up stream and began pulling in slow, measured strokes. The boat made but slow progress, loaded down as she was, and from the looks of things Tom judged it would take them longer than the time calculated on to reach the border line of Mexico and Arizona. However, they were committed to the adventure, and they had to put it through somehow. The boys pulled alternately until midnight, by which time they were so tired out that they had to put in to the shore and land. They secured the boat to the bank, and as neither felt in condition to stand watch, they decided they would have to risk going to sleep at the same time. They crawled into some bushes close by, and almost before they had stretched themselves out they were fast asleep. The sun was shining when they awoke, and crawling out of their retreat, they hastened to see if everything was all right with the boat. To their great satisfaction nothing had happened to it or its cargo, and they proceeded to eat their breakfast. The country around was but thinly settled, for they saw only two small houses in the distance. Breakfast over, they shoved off and continued their way up the river. About noon they came to a wooded district on the nearest bank, and as the sun was now pouring its rays straight down on the landscape, they were glad to land and seek the shelter of the trees. Here they remained for several hours, and then resumed their trip.

"If anybody tells me this is easy money we're making I'll tell him he's a liar. It's my opinion we're earning every cent of what we expect to get out of this ore."

"I think we are, Bob, and we're bound to realize that fact more and more every day this trip lasts."

"I wish a tugboat would come along and give us a lift."

"Yes, we're likely to meet with one—I don't think."

"I'm afraid our provisions won't hold out. We calculated that a week's supply would see us through, but I think it won't by a considerable margin."

"Oh, we needn't worry about that. We are bound to meet places en route where we can replenish our commissary department."

As soon as it got dark they tied up on the bank and had supper. While eating they saw many lights shining through the darkness in various directions, and judged they came from houses scattered about the landscape.

The Sierra de Antunez range still stretched along the opposite shore, and as far north as they could see. The moon rose early that evening, and under its mellow beams the boys resumed their toilsome journey toward the land of the Stars and Stripes. Tom wondered if he held a place in the thoughts of Dora Ardsley that night.

Late that night they pulled the boat up a little creek, where they intended to stay till morning. They hid the boat in a mass of rushes and walked over to a deserted hovel they spied a short distance off. The building comprised a story and a half, the upper section being nothing more than a low loft, to which access was obtained by a ladder in a corner. There was nothing at all in the single room of the ground floor, but there was a lot of loose straw in the loft. This, when gathered together, was enough to make two soft beds, so the boys decided to roost there for the night, with the stars peeping in on them through a score of openings. They had been asleep a couple of hours when Tom awoke with a start.

At first he could not understand what had aroused him, but he soon became aware that there were two or more persons in the room below. They were talking together, and what particularly attracted his attention was the fact that their conversation was carried on in English. The men had a light, for Tom could see it shining through a crack in the floor near his head. With due caution he crawled over to the hole and placed his eye to it. With a start he recognized the three bandits they had escaped from on the previous evening. He soon found that he and Bob were the subjects of their discourse.

"We ought to be able to head them off to-morrow morning at the Bend," said Dave Hamlin. "We'll tie a stone to their legs and sink 'em in the river, and then we'll take the boat. It's just the thing we want to escape from this blamed country in."

"They have a lot of bags in the boat full of somethin' or other," said one of his companions. "It must be worth somethin' or they wouldn't be carryin' them up the river."

"If it's stuff we kin make anythin' out of we'll keep it, otherwise into the river it goes," said Hamlin.

"Are you sure we kin reach 'em at the Bend?"

"Of course I'm sure. The stream makes a sweep at that point which carries everythin' close in shore. We'll hide in the bushes near the water, and at the right moment jump out and nab 'em."

"You owe one of them somethin' for the bullet you got in your arm."

"Owe 'em somethin'? Well, I rather guess I do! It was them that made me a prisoner the other night in the room where I had the girl confined. Afterward they helped our two prisoners off. The escape of the old man and his daughter is what led to the attack on our stronghold by the boys. What puzzles me is how they got into the monastery without being discovered. Villanos, who was in charge of the gate, swore that they didn't come over the wall, nor through the gate. He only opened it once during the afternoon while we were away on that procession, and that was to let in Bruno and Anson with a burro laden with provisions, which disappeared in a most mysterious way after they left the inn."

"What's the diff'rence? They got in somehow, and their gettin' in done us up. The band is broken up, and them as isn't dead by this time are captured. The soldiers are scouring the district for any that has escaped, so we ain't got no time to lose gettin' back to the good old United States."

They continued to talk about one thing or another, and especially about getting square with the two boys, to whom they laid all their present trouble, for an hour, and Tom listened to them, while Bob slept on, unconscious that their three enemies were so close to them.

"Well, let's turn in and take a snooze," said Hamlin at last, with a yawn. "We've had a hard day of it dodgin' them sogers. Hello! What's that?"

To Tom's dismay Bob rolled over in his sleep and scraped his shoe loudly on the boards. The noise attracted the instant attention of the three ruffians below, and they looked up at the ceiling.

CHAPTER XV.—Conclusion.

"There's somebody up there," said Hamlin with an imprecation.

"Maybe what we heard was a rat. There's nobody livin' in this old shack," replied one of his companions.

"It's somebody that's hidin' there," said the bandit leader.

"Maybe it's one of the band."

"And maybe it's some spy who'll carry the news of our whereabouts to the sogers."

"Then we'd better go up and see who it is. We can't afford to take chances. Hangin' is what we may count on if we're caught."

"I'm a-goin' up," said Hamlin, moving toward the ladder.

Tom realized that things were approaching a crisis, so, putting his hand over his companion's mouth, he woke him up.

"What's the matter?" asked Bob.

"We're in great danger. Get your gun out."

"What danger?" said Bob.

"The three bandits who attacked us near the old wharf last evening are downstairs."

"They are?"

"And, what's worse, they're coming up here."

As Tom spoke Bob heard the ladder shake under the weight of Hamlin.

"We'll give them a warm reception, then," muttered Bob, drawing his revolver.

A moment later the ruffian stuck his head up into the loft. The moonlight, shining through a dozen holes in the roof, made the place very bright so that the bandit had no difficulty in seeing all that was up there. He uttered an imprecation when his gaze rested on the two boys, whom he immediately recognized. Forgetting perhaps, or at least disregarding the fact, that the boys were armed, he sprang into the loft.

"Surrender, you young imps!" he cried, drawing his revolver with his left hand, for his right arm was bound up and somewhat out of business. Tom's reply was a shot from his revolver. The bullet passed through Hamlin's chest, and he fell with a hoarse cry.

"Get hold of his revolver, Bob. There are two others below who are likely to give us a lot of trouble," said Tom.

One of the other rascals was in the act of following Hamlin up the ladder when the shot rang out, and the bandit's fall shook the rickety building. He stopped and looked at his companion.

"Whoever is up there has shot Dave," he said.

"Then we'll go up and avenge him," replied the other, drawing his gun.

"They'll have the drop on one of us before we kin get into the loft," said his associate, pausing irresolutely half way up the ladder.

"Bah! Let me lead the way if you're afraid," sneered the other ruffian.

Bob, peering down through a crack in the floor, decided that the speaker looked pretty dangerous, so he shoved the muzzle of his revolver through the opening and fired at him. The ball struck him on his pistol arm, and his weapon fell to the floor. With a cry of agony he sprang for the door and disappeared into the night. The other bandit, left alone to face the trouble, decided that discretion was the better part of valor, and, jumping from the ladder, made for the door. Tom fired at his legs. The fellow uttered a howl and went limping off, which showed that he had received some kind of a wound, even if it was only a flesh one.

"We've licked them," said Bob triumphantly. "I wonder if the fellow you shot is dead. He's been lying mighty quiet."

The boys examined the ruffian leader and found he was not dead. He seemed to be badly wounded, though.

"What will we do with him?"

"Drag him downstairs and leave him, and then we'll get back to the boat, for I don't think it's safe to stay in this house any longer."

After nearly two weeks of tough labor at the oars they reached the town of Rawlings, on the line of the Southern Pacific railroad, about ten miles north of the Mexican border line.

Tom hastened to arrange for the transfer of the gold ore to the nearest smelter.

Receiving a receipt for the ore, they at once took a train north for the district where Bob's father was in charge of extensive mining operations.

After reading John Boland's autobiography, he decided that Claim No. 7 was worth investigating.

Taking the boys with him, he paid a visit to the mine, and he soon assured himself that the lost lode was really where the dead prospector had located it.

"You boys have got a fortune here," he said. "I will see that it is secured to you by authority of the Mexican government, and then I would advise you to sell out the mine to persons able to work it. I will make it my business to get you a fair price for it."

"All right, Mr. Gillette, we'll leave the matter in your hands," replied Tom.

On their way back East they stopped over at St. Louis and called on Mr. Ardsley and Dora.

Mr. Ardsley acknowledged the gratitude he felt to them for helping him and Dora out of their terrible position, and assured them that they would always be welcome visitors at his home whenever they came West.

The boys remained for several days as guests of the banker, and Tom made good use of the time to make himself solid with Dora.

Tom and Bob received nearly \$10,000 each out of the gold ore they had so laboriously rowed up the Santa Cruz River.

Later on their rights in Claim No. 7 were disposed of by Mr. Gillette to a couple of Mexican capitalists for a handsome royalty on the output of the mine.

When this royalty had panned out \$50,000, the capitalists offered to buy the mine outright for three-quarters of a million, and their offer was accepted.

Thus both Tom and Bob became rich boys, and when the former offered his heart and hand to Dora Ardsley he was accepted by both the girl and her father.

In due time they were married, and Tom went into business with Bob in New York.

They are living to-day, rich and prosperous, but they lay all their good luck to the start they received from the prospector's legacy—Claim No. 7.

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The Wall Street Hoodoo

— or —

The Boy the Brokers Feared

By Gaston Garne

(A Serial Story.)

CHAPTER II.

How the War Went On.

"Oh, that's a free show," said the youth. "They want to run me out of Wall Street, but they can't do it. 'I'm here to stay. Those chaps think they own it, but they don't.'"

The next boy who came along got one-half of his face well blackened.

Finally one of the assailants, at least a head taller than the newcomer, came up and stood by, waiting for him to finish his job.

The boy at work looked up at him as if to size him up.

There was such a difference in their sizes that the broker who was having his shoes shined determined to collar the large one and turn him over to the police if he made an attack; but it wasn't necessary for him to do so, for as soon as the boy finished his job he sprang to his feet and faced the larger bootblack.

They mixed up instantly and went down on the pavement and rolled over two or three times, and then the assailant exerted all his strength to get away.

He caught his breath several times as though gasping.

When he did get away, he ran as if for dear life.

The other bootblacks joined him and heard his story.

"What'd you do to that fellow?" the broker asked.

"Oh, I just pinned him up a little bit, sir, and he showed in his hand a pin.

"Oh, that is it, is it?"

"Yes; he got it half a dozen times. You see it ain't no concealed weapon; it ain't a gun or a knife; but heaven bless you, sir, it makes a fellow feel hot, let me tell you."

That was the last assault made on him that day.

The bootblacks concluded that he was too hot a member for them. But they attended to business but little. Only now and then did one get down to work.

They were the maddest set of boys ever seen in that locality.

The newsboys themselves took an interest in it, and they watched the newcomer with a good deal of curiosity.

After business hours the brokers hurried uptown in a great stream, and the bootblack went along in the crowd and disappeared from sight.

He had done a pretty good business.

That evening one of the brokers asked a well-known reporter if he wanted a little sensational item.

"Always," said the reporter.

"Then come down to Wall Street tomorrow

morning and call at my office and I'll take you out on the Street and give you a sight of a mimic warfare."

"All right," and promptly the next morning the reporter and the broker were out on Wall Street, at the corner of Broad, looking for the bootblack.

The broker pointed out the boy to the reporter and told him of the war that was being made on him by the other boys, who had pre-empted the the Wall Street section.

"Oh, I've seen that sort of thing many a time in other parts of the city," said the reporter.

"Well, you wait. I've seen something like it up near the City Hall, but the tactics here are somewhat different. You will find that the newcomer is a splendid tactician."

The reporter caught the boy's eye and beckoned to him.

He walked briskly across the street, but avoided running.

"Gimme a shine," said the reporter, and he and the broker stood there talking while the boy got down to business.

Finally the reporter said:

"See here, cully, I've been down here many a time, but never got onto you before. You are a newcomer, are you not?"

"Yes, sir. Just dropped down this way a few days ago."

"All right. How do you find business?"

"Pretty good, so far, sir," and he went on polishing without looking up.

"What's your name?"

"Bob, sir."

"Bobsir," the reporter repeated. "That's a queer name. Don't think I ever heard it before. Bobsir; how do you spell it?"

"B-o-b, Bob."

"Well, that is only half of it. I understood you to say Bobsir."

The bootblack looked up at him with rather an amused expression on his face and said:

"That's all right, sir, you are kiddin' me. But you can't hoodoo me, sir," and as he finished the remark he tapped his shoe and held up his hand for the expected nickel.

The reporter dropped it into his hand with the remark:

"Don't you make any discrimination in your charges?"

"No, sir. It is a nickel for every shine. Three cents for one shoe and a nickel for both."

"All right. That's quite a difference. It gives a one-legged man a show."

To keep him on hand so as to get a chance to witness the opening of the war the broker asked for a shine himself.

The boy had scarcely gotten a start when a bootblack came flying down the street with his box swinging by the strap, and it struck him on the hip a tremendous whack.

The next instant he sprang to his feet and yanked the box from under the broker's foot, saying:

"Excuse me, sir," and he dashed off in pursuit of his fleeing assailant.

The latter heard him coming, and fearing injury, he looked back to measure the distance between them, and the next moment he smashed into a lamppost and went down on the sidewalk utterly unconscious.

His pursuer wheeled right about and returned to finish the job on the broker's shoes.

"Did you catch him?" the broker asked.

"No, sir. I hoodooed him, and he butted against the lamppost, and I guess they'll have to send him home in a pushcart."

The reporter and broker saw a crowd quickly gather at the lamppost on the corner below.

The lad had fallen unconscious and was bleeding freely from a wound on the side of his head.

A policeman summoned an ambulance to take him to the hospital.

The other bootblacks who were looking on were amazed at the turn affairs had taken. But some of them went to the officer and told him that a bootblack had knocked the boy down with his blacking-box.

A man in the crowd who had witnessed the accident seized him by the coat collar, gave him a good shaking and asked:

"What in thunder are you telling such a lie for? I saw him butt the lamppost myself."

"Well, the other fellow was chasin' him."

"That's all right. But he never touched him. The first thing you know you'll have the sheriff chasing you, for a boy who will tell such a yarn as that is bound to butt up against something worse than a lamppost some day."

On seeing their companion taken to the hospital in an ambulance, the bootblacks became somewhat demoralized.

Those who didn't see the accident firmly believed that the newcomer nearly killed him, whereas he hadn't touched him. The newcomer himself, though, was considerably hurt, and when he arose from his job he was noticed to limp.

"See here, Bob," said the reporter, "that was a pretty hard blow you got."

"Yes, sir. But he got a harder one."

"Well, that doesn't do you any good, for you didn't give it to him."

Bob winked at him and remarked:

"Maybe I didn't, and maybe I did. I hoodooed him."

"Nonsense. You can't hoodoo anybody."

"Maybe I can't, sir, and maybe I can," and with that he went limping off down the street.

CHAPTER III.

Bob and the Reporter.

Neither the reporter nor the broker had any urgent business on hand at that time.

They stood at the corner of Broad and Wall streets, watching the bootblacks. But the accident to the newcomer's assailant suspended hostilities for an hour or two, during which time Bob was kept quite busy shining shoes.

The others were neglecting business and holding a council of war.

Finally the broker returned to his office, and the reporter, in search of news, went over and interviewed the bootblack the second time, and learned from him that his name was Whiddon.

He said he lived uptown on the East Side, and that he had been hustling for a living since he was twelve years old.

He seemed loathe to volunteer any information

as to his personal affairs, but he answered questions politely as fast as they were put to him.

"Say, Bob," the reporter asked, "Why did you come downtown here into Wall Street and leave your old stamping-ground up-town?"

"Because I understood there was money down in Wall Street, and I want some of it."

"Well, why don't you open an office and buy stocks?" the reporter inquired.

"Wait, boss, and gimme time."

"How much time do you want?"

"Just enough to get a rest from answering fool questions."

The reporter saw that he was hard hit, but he laughed and remarked:

"That's all right, Bob. The only way to get along in Wall Street is to hit back."

"Yes, sir, and anywhere else. If a fellow doesn't hit back he soon gets down on his back."

"That's so, the reporter assented. "But say, didn't that blow you got a while ago hurt?"

"You bet it did. But that fellow's head hurts more than my hip does."

"Well, what are you going to do for it? You'll probably be lame to-morrow."

"Oh, I'll rub some kerosene on it tonight."

"Kersene! Will that cure a bruise?"

"Yes, sir. It will cure a good many things," and he turned to look for passing customers.

"Say, Bob, how long does it take you to put up a decent shine?"

"That depends upon what sort of a shine a man wants. There is a difference in the size of shoes. On some it takes me ten minutes to make a decent job, while others I can finish in five."

The reporter pulled out his watch and said:

"See here, Bob, you keep on polishing my shoes, and every five minutes I'll give you a nickel. I want to see what those other bootblacks will do to you."

"That's a go," and he put down his blacking-box, spread down his little square of carpet and went polishing the reporter's shoes again.

Meanwhile the latter kept questioning him.

Finally he said:

"Look out. Here comes another one."

Bob looked around and saw a bootblack coming at full speed, swinging his box by the strap.

Just as the runner gave the box a swing to hit him, Bob dodged almost around behind the reporter, and, of course, escaped the blow, but it struck a gentleman who was coming toward him.

It was a hard blow. The gentleman gave a grunt and almost doubled up.

A man about fifteen or twenty feet behind him saw it, and he reached out and caught the boy, who struggled hard to get away.

The victim took charge of him and made a prisoner of him, giving him a shaking that made his teeth rattle.

Naturally a crowd quickly gathered, and the inevitable policeman put in his appearance and marched the young rowdy off to the police station.

The two gentlemen went along to prefer charges against him.

"Bob, you've landed another one," remarked the reporter.

"Yes, sir. I hoodooed him, but I'm sorry for the gentleman who got hit."

(To be continued)

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NEW YORK, JULY 1, 1927

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INTERESTING ARTICLES

DROWNS IN RAIN BARREL

Calvin Culver, little son of Clinton Culver of Otisville, near Middletown, N. Y., climbed on top of a tipping rain barrel lid and fell to his death recently.

As he went down the pivoted lid swung shut and it was fifteen minutes before the father discovered what had happened. He saw the lid moving and, thinking an animal had fallen into the barrel, reached in and drew out the body of his son.

HUGE PHOTO MAP OF FLOOD

Experts in the photographic section at Wilbur Wright Field are finishing the most gigantic and comprehensive photographic mapping project ever undertaken. When completed the mosaic, made of thousands of individual prints, will show the devastation along the Mississippi River. It will be used by engineers in attempting to solve the problem of how to make the Father of Waters behave in the future.

Every foot of territory from Cairo, Ill., where the Ohio empties into the Mississippi, south to the Gulf will be included. All "shots" for the mosaic must be made from a uniform altitude.

When finished the films will be cut and pieced together where they overlap, thus forming one gigantic photographic map showing actual conditions, an achievement not possible under any other system of survey.

TO MARK TRAIL OF KNOX

New York and Massachusetts have completed plans for setting monuments along the route of General Henry Knox and his men in hauling to Cambridge the cannon captured by Ethan Allen's Green Mountain Boys when they took old Fort Ticonderoga from the British.

Thirty granite markers mounted with bronze plaques are to be placed at intervals on the trail in New York. Massachusetts will set markers similar in design at points in that State through which the intrepid Americans passed. The first

shaft will be erected close to Fort Ticonderoga, probably on July 4.

Fifty-five cannon, large and small, came into the hands of the Americans when the fortress fell. Knox, then 25, suggested to Washington that the artillery would be of service in driving the British out of Boston, and the youthful officer drew the assignment of seeing that they got to the Massachusetts city.

Starting on Nov. 15, 1775, with the guns loaded on oxcarts for their long trek across the snow-bound wilderness, Knox followed the Hudson River road through Lake George, Glens Falls, Fort Edward, Schuylerville, Bemis Heights, Stillwater, Mechanicville, Waterford and Cohoes to Albany, crossing the Hudson on the ice on Jan. 7, 1776.

Knox proceeded on the east side of the Hudson through Kinderhook, Valatie, Claverack and Hillsdale, and then crossed the Massachusetts line. He reached Cambridge, after many hardships, on Jan. 24.

The plaque on each of the New York markers has been designed by Henry Albright, Albany artist.

LAUGHS

Mother (to naughty Ethel)—Ethel, do I have to speak to you again? Ethel—No, mother, *not* unless you want to!

Temperance lecturer—Friends, how can we stop the sale of liquor? Inebriate (in the rear of the hall)—Give it away.

Salesman—This vase is really worth \$30, but there being a little chip off here, I will sell it to you for \$20. Customer—can't you break off another little chip and let me have it for \$10?

"My boy," said the patronizing member of the club, as he handed around the Flor de Toofas, "that's something like a cigar!" "Yes," responded one of the victims after he had taken a puff or two, "what is it?"

At a domestic economy lesson in Chicago a young matron was asked by the lecturer to state briefly the best way to keep milk from souring. After some reflection, the young woman replied: "Leave it to the cow."

The sick man had just come out of a long delirium. "Where am I?" he said feebly, as he felt the loving hands making him comfortable. "Where am I? In heaven?" "No, dear," cooed his devoted wife, "I am still with you."

A doctor in the country received one day a letter from an old woman asking for a bottle of cough mixture for her husband, ending with the postscript: "Please, sir, don't make it too strong, as the poor man has only got one leg."

"Goodness, little boy!" exclaimed the kindly old gentleman to the weeping youth. "What on earth is the matter?" "I had a terrible accident," bawled the boy. "Gracious! What was it?" "I met pop when I was a-playin' hookey."

Saving a Mail Car

It was on a Virginia road.

When we stopped for the "snack" at Millford, Captain Darracott told me he had three suspicious-looking passengers in the forward car.

They would not come into the hotel to partake of the lunch, though he had invited them to do so.

The conductor was so much interested in getting the passengers to partake of the lunch, that I had several times jokingly insisted that he shared the profits with the seedy Virginian who kept the hotel; and the snack was the burden of the business done by the house.

Darracott was very social, and I am sure this was the extent of his interest in the collision.

"There is no law that compels them to be social," I replied.

"I saw them looking over the mail and baggage car before the train started," added the captain.

"Possibly to see that their baggage was on board," I added, and I was sometimes inclined to tease him.

A passenger invited him to visit the bar for the sociability of the thing, and nothing more was said about the three men, but I had curiosity enough to pass through the forward car and take a look at them.

They were well-dressed gentlemen, though rather swellish in their garb.

As I passed through the car, they seemed to be very busy with their newspapers, though I am confident they were engaged in conversation when I opened the door.

I went to the machine, passing through the baggage car, half of which was used for the mails.

We called it the mail car as often as the baggage car.

It was not a postal car; and the mail sacks were simply locked into a room partitioned off from the rest of the car for the purpose.

At this time we had brakes on the passenger cars, but none on the mail car.

The wooden couplers, or shackles, were still in use; and I have no doubt they saved many lives and much property when accidents occurred.

Darracott rang the big bell on the forward car, and I started the train.

I had not gone more than a mile, when an old cow ran on the track in front of the engine.

She wanted to get across the road, and was too stupid to measure her distance from the locomotive.

The machine hit her.

As soon as the beast had been disposed of, Darracott rang the big bell, and hurried the passengers back into the cars, for the accident made us late.

Among the passengers gathered around the engine, I noticed the three swellish men who had excited the prejudices of the captain. They were in no hurry to return to the train, and stood looking at the dead cow until all the rest had left.

As the wheels of the machine began to turn they started for the forward car.

My eye followed them, and I saw them jump upon the rear platform of the mail car.

There were no smoking cars at the time of which I speak, and it was no uncommon thing for

passengers to ride in the baggage car to enjoy their pipes and cigars.

One of the swells had lighted a cigar while he stood looking at the cow, and I concluded that the trio intended to smoke.

I did not think of them again, though there were some suspicious circumstances connected with them.

We were now approaching the long down grade below Millford.

"Hi, hi! massa!" suddenly shouted the negro who worked on the tender. "We done lose de whole train 'cept de mail car!"

The road was as straight as an arrow, and I saw the passenger cars at least a mile behind.

One of the wooden shackles had broken again, I naturally supposed.

I could not tell whether the cars were moving or not at that distance, and I did not consider it prudent to check the speed of the engine, though the brakemen had been directed to stop the cars whenever they were detached.

I kept the machine going, and commenced the descent of the long grade.

When I had gone another mile, I was satisfied that the cars had been stopped.

I pushed in the throttle, and told the darky to put on the brake of the tender.

At this moment one of the three swellish men came to the platform of the mail car, and climbed upon the rear of the tender.

"If you stop the engine you are a dead man!" yelled the man, pointing a pistol at me.

I did not like the looks of the weapon, and I pulled out the throttle again.

The negro shouted "Murder!" and deserting the brake, dropped upon the floor of the tender.

The man with the pistols seated himself on the highest part of the tender, and seemed to be satisfied with the situation.

I shoved in the throttle once more, for the grade was enough to carry the machine without any steam.

I had time to think.

The three men whom Darracott had suspected had come on the train for the purpose of robbing the mail car.

How could I save it?

I had no doubt they were rifling the mail sacks at that moment.

Looking back again, I saw that the passenger cars were coming down the grade.

I concluded that Darracott had started the train to save time; and as he had brakes, he could control the speed on the cars.

The robber on the tender kept his eyes on me all the time, and I thought he did not see the train.

"Come down, Tom!" called one of the men in the mail car.

The fellow with the pistol leaped down, and disappeared in the car.

Then I saw the side door of the car opened, and several mail sacks were thrown out.

I suppose they knew which ones to take, for they left the bags which contained only newspapers and other matter than letters.

I was at a loss to understand the reason for this action, but subsequent proceedings of the robbers explained it.

The man with the pistol came out on the platform again.

With an iron bar he had found in the car, he smashed the wooden shackle.

The rascals were repeating the blunder of Cobby, and supposed the mail car would stop if it was detached from the engine.

But the car did not abate its speed.

The robbers had left the door of the car open, and I could see that they were filled with consternation to find the car was still in motion.

When I saw the fellow with the pistol coming forward again, I pulled out the throttle, and ran ahead of the mail car, for I did not care to have his company on the engine.

My machine was a good one, and was in first rate condition.

I could do anything I pleased with it, and I kept it a short distance ahead of the car.

While the robbers were wondering why the car did not come to a standstill, I saw the train stop when it came up with the mail sacks which had been thrown out.

Darracott picked them all up, and not one was lost.

So far as robbing the mail was concerned, the game was all up with the villains in the car.

The mail was saved, and the question now was how to save the car.

Darracott guessed the conundrum.

After he had gathered up the mail bags he started his train again.

It was in the heaviest of the grade, and in a few moments the cars were running down the declivity at a fearful rate of speed.

I began to think that the captain intended to smash the mail car, and was getting up all the speed he could for this purpose.

I increased the distance between the engine and the car, and watched with interest for the result.

As the train approached the stray car I saw the man on the forward platform on the brake.

Darracott stood by his side, and was directing the action of those at the brakes with the big bell over his head.

As the train was heavier than the mail car, its speed was greater; but it was readily checked with the brakes.

It was very near the car, and I had become much excited over the matter.

I expected one or the other of the moving bodies would be smashed.

But no such result followed.

I heard a little bumping when the cars came together, and the forward one swayed a little, but there was no crash.

The skilful handling of the brakes had reduced the danger to almost nothing; but it made all the difference in the world whether the train was before or behind the loose car.

A moment after the cars had come together I heard the report of a pistol in the mail car, which was only a short distance behind me.

I had no doubt that Captain Darracott had pitched into the robbers as soon as he found them, for he was a tough old fellow, and possibly he had been shot for his temerity.

Presently I found I was running away from the train; and this fact assured me that the captain had found some way to secure the mail car, and was putting on the brakes on the rear cars.

I checked the engine, and finally stopped it.

By this time the train had come to a standstill, and I ran back.

As I stopped I saw the fellow who had confronted me with the pistol leap from the mail car.

In an instant he was on the footboard of the machine.

"Go ahead or you are a dead man!" cried he, pointing the pistol at me.

He was intensely excited; and I had no doubt his companion had been captured or shot.

He stepped between me and the fireman.

I put my hand on the throttle, as if to comply with his demand.

The fireman, being behind him, threw his arms around his neck, and dragged him over backward.

In the struggle the pistol was discharged, and I heard the bullet whistle through the air above my head.

I assisted the fireman in securing his man, whom we handed over to a deputy sheriff who happened to be on the train.

I found that one of the robbers had been shot through the right arm by Captain Darracott when he entered the mail car; another had jumped from the train; and we had the third.

"You did not manage it very well," I said to the man I had assisted in capturing.

"It is all up now. I expected the mail car would stop when I cut it loose from the engine," he replied, very despondently. "And I can't see why it did not."

"It didn't stop because it was on a down grade ten miles long," I added.

"I did not notice that it was downhill," said he, as the sheriff put a pair of bracelets on his wrists. "But I must spend some years in prison because of that down grade."

He was right there; and he did spend the next three years in the penitentiary.

4 MILLION ESTATE GOES TO ARMY OFFICER'S WIFE

Mrs. Armantine H. McAlister, widow of William H. McAlister, formerly secretary of the American Tobacco Company, left her entire estate to her daughter, Mrs. Amelia McAlister Upsher, of 210 West Ninetieth Street, by the terms of her will filed for probate yesterday.

Mrs. Upsher comes into a fortune estimated at more than \$4,000,000 as, in addition to whatever money her mother leaves her, she will receive two-thirds of her father's residuary estate left to Mrs. McAlister for life. One-third of her father's residuary estate was let in trust for her directly. She is the wife of Major Alfred P. Upsher, of the United States Army.

Mrs. McAlister died on May 30 last. The will was executed on January 8, 1926. Mr. McAlister died only eleven days before the instrument was drawn.

Only \$50,000 remains in the estate of Jacob A. Hirschman, once a partner in the Lion Brewing Company, who in 1918 was known to have had half a million dollars, it was disclosed when his will was filed for probable yesterday. Prohibition was the cause of the decline in his finances, it was said by lawyers for the estate.

Mrs. Carrie H. Kohnstamm, of 800 Riverside Drive, his daughter, will receive two-thirds of the estate and Miss Jennie Kirschman, of the same address, will receive the remaining third.

ITEMS OF INTEREST

CIGARETTE-CIGAR SMOKING RATIO 14 TO 1 HERE, HIGHER ABROAD

Americans now smoke fourteen cigarettes to every cigar, according to statistics given out by the Tobacco Trade Congress here.

Cigarettes have displaced cigars even more in England, where the ratio is 400 to 1.

Frenchmen smoke 40 cigarettes to 1 cigar

The congress stated that the consumption of cigars in the United States had dropped during the past ten years from 8,000,000,000 to under 7,000,000,000.

BATHS RARE IN FLOOD ZONE

A bath is the hardest thing to obtain in the flood sections of Louisiana. There is plenty of water, but few places for one to bathe, especially if he happens to be a member of Congress.

When the Congressional party reached here after an inspection tour through flooded areas it was met by a reception committee anxious to provide any entertainment desired. The committee-men were amazed when the visitors insisted on delaying the program until "we get a bath."

Newspapermen who have toured this area with various parties have suffered along with the members of Congress, but being less important and met by no reception committees, hid themselves to hotels to rent bath tubs before returning to their quarters on the train.

KEEPSAKE UNIFORMS READY FOR VETERAN SOLDIERS SOON

Former soldiers who wish to treasure uniforms like those they wore in the service will be able with in two months to purchase them from the War Department. Some 5,000,000 persons, including former army nurses, are eligible to purchase the uniforms under an act of Congress.

For a few dollars the veteran will be able to assemble a complete uniform, with items ranging from discharge chevrons at 3 cents each to woolen blouses at \$5.91 and overcoats at \$9.23. The overseas cap, a product of the World War, will be sold for \$1.13, the campaign hat at \$2.33.

The applications should be directed, according to residence, to the Quartermaster Supply Officer at New York, Chicago, San Francisco or Fort Sam Houston, Texas.

VIEW COAL DUST FUEL TEST

Belief that the fuel operation costs on the Shipping Board's 300 vessels now in service would be reduced almost 50 per cent. through equipping them with a coal pulverizing apparatus was expressed by members of the Fuel Conservation Committee of the Shipping Board recently at an official demonstration showing results of tests with the crusher.

For several years fuel experts of the Shipping Board and the Navy Department have been conducting tests with the special pulverizing apparatus at the Philadelphia Navy Yard, and the committee spent recently observing the demonstrations directed by C. S. Jefferson, head of the board's fuel conservation section.

Vessels equipped with this apparatus can use a

cheap grade of coal. After it is pulverized it is forced by compressed air into burners, thus eliminating all "hand firing." Mr. Jefferson predicted that the crusher would not only cut the fuel operation almost in half, but would give about the same efficiency as oil.

MISSISSIPPI LEVEE ONCE BLOWN UP BY GRANT'S MEN

The Mississippi River disaster, with its vast area of towns, villages and plantations buried under a sea of water, recalls vividly to one of General Grant's veteran soldiers a like spectacle during the Civil War, when much of the valley suffered a similar fate.

It was sixty-four years ago, but the event to the writer was as yesterday. Ten thousand of Grant's soldiers were ordered one morning to blow up the Mississippi levee and make an inland sea of the whole region above Vicksburg. Vicksburg was the Gibraltar of the Mississippi River. No place in America was fortified as it was. Yet its capture was a necessity to the North. It controlled the great stream for hundreds of miles. One might venture to say that ten of thousands of lives were lost in trying to capture it. All in vain.

On Feb. 24, 1863, a fleet of seven gunboats and seventeen steamers, each carrying 1,000 soldiers, assembled at the great cut above Helena. At the firing of a gun each boat in its turn was to make its dash down the descent in a whirlpool of waters. Going over Niagara would not have seemed more dangerous to most of us. To give us courage a military band stood on the levee and played as we plunged through the crevice and down over the cotton fields below.

Probably such a sight was never seen before. In spite of the risk, thousands of the soldiers cheered while their boats were being swirled about like straws in the running water. The pilots lost all control of their steamers.

Then came the unique scene of a whole fleet sailing over fields and plantations and through forests for days.

For days and days we sailed around that strange uncharted sea. Here and there we were hailed by some planter or his family whose home was perched on a bit of high land. We would stop to trade crackers for chickens and then pass on. The negroes thought the world was coming to an end and prayed that we take them in the ark. We left them part of our army rations and steamed along.

Suddenly there was a halt on some high ground near the Yahabusha River. The enemy had built a tremendous fort and we were welcomed by a blast of cannon. On top of all, the great river behind us was beginning to recede. Four days more and our whole fleet would have been stranded on the cotton fields of the South. By rapid steaming we barely got back into the great river in time to save our ships and our lives.

Vicksburg was to be captured later, but by starvation and assault; and, in the words of Lincoln, the great river was to flow again "unvexed to the sea."—N. Y. Times.

TIMELY TOPICS

ELECTRICITY IN AIR WITHERS WHEAT

Electricity generated by dust and high wind-storms on the western sweep of Kansas prairies has been added to the foes of the Kansas wheat crop.

Reports of "electrocution" of thousands of acres of growing wheat this Spring have received cognizance by the State Weather Bureau here and by the Division of Agriculture College at Manhattan.

"It is a pretty well-founded theory," said S. B. Flora, State weather observer, in commenting on the reports today. "During dry seasons the dust carries charges of electricity. Wire fences and windmills are charged and the electricity will give off sparks half an inch long. I have no knowledge that growing plants will give off sparks. After such disturbances growing wheatfields turn brown and the wheat dies. The after-effects are similar to those of a severe frost."

Dean L. E. Call, head of the Division of Agriculture of the College at Manhattan, said not a great deal was known as to what caused the dying condition of the wheat which had been noted recently. Extensive experiments would be made this Summer, he added.

Professor S. C. Samon of the Astronomy Department of the College confirmed the statement that the atmosphere sometimes becomes so heavily charged with electricity that it kills green plants with which it comes in contact.

BARNUM PROPOSED A FLIGHT OVER OCEAN 53 YEARS AGO

Fifty-three years before Captain Charles A. Lindbergh accomplished his flight across the Atlantic from New York to Paris, that illustrious showman, P. T. Barnum, startled the country with a scheme to finance a balloon voyage to Europe—and thereby obtained wide publicity for Barnum and his museum.

Barnum was usually front page news and when he arrived home from a European trip in 1874 he called in the newspaper reporters to tell them about his proposed overseas balloon. Barnum said he had no personal desire to cross the Atlantic by air, and he would not encourage others to make the voyage until he was reasonably certain that it could be made without imperiling the lives of the aeronauts.

A Philadelphia aeronaut named Wise and his son were eager to try the feat, as were also eight aeronauts in Europe. One of them, an official in the English mint, had written to Barnum stating that he would make the transatlantic trip in a balloon if it were prepared as he desired. There was really nothing to fear. Professor Hodsman of Dublin had crossed the Irish Channel the previous year (1873) in a balloon, and he assured Barnum that there was little risk in the adventure.

Hodsman told Barnum that he had constructed a balloon, inflated it, left the gas in it for thirty days, and not a leak or break was found in the fabric at the expiration of that time. If Barnum would have such a balloon made for him, Hodsman would willingly attempt to cross from Amer-

ica to England. The voyage would have to be begun in America, according to the theory of Professor Nadir of France, who said that a strong current of air from west to east prevails at a certain altitude. Both scientists told Barnum that the passage could be made in forty-eight hours.

The kind of balloon recommended was a balloon made of tulle silk, properly seasoned and air tight. There were to be an inner and an outer balloon, fitting closely as hand and glove, but independent of each other. The whole to be eighty feet in diameter. The balloon would hold 268,000 feet of gas and possess a lifting power of 16,700 pounds.

Barnum went to Spitalfields, Manchester, Lyons and other places abroad to ascertain the probable cost, and learned that it would be at least \$30,000.

Barnum did not consider himself finally committed to the project, yet he made every provision for its fulfillment the moment that he was satisfied there would be no extraordinary danger in the flight. He announced through the press that he would willingly invest \$50,000 if he thought "that there was no unusually good chance of the voyages losing their lives." It was a good newspaper yarn but nothing ever came of it save talk. —N. Y. Times.

ECLIPSE OF MOON AND SUN

June promises to be a Roman holiday for those astronomically inclined. Two eclipses will come this month, a total eclipse of the moon on the 15th, which will be visible throughout the United States, and a total eclipse of the sun, which will be seen in parts of Europe and Asia. A third event of astronomical interest will be the close approach of Pons-Winnecke's comet on the 21st.

The lunar eclipse will begin at 12:43 a. m., Central standard time, June 15, when the moon enters the umbra of the earth's shadow. A dark notch will appear on the east limb of the moon, gradually overspreading it until the eclipse becomes total, at 2:14 a. m. Totality ends at 2:35, and at 4:06 a. m. the moon will be entirely out of the shadow.

On June 29, two weeks after its emergence from the earth's shadow, the moon will have completed half its circuit and will pass between us and the sun. Its shadow touches the earth at sunrise west of the British Isles, moves eastward across England and Norway, skirts northern Asia and leaves the earth at sunset off the Alaskan coast. Precisely two hours will elapse between arrival and departure.

Only the tip of the moon's shadow cone brushes the earth. The diameter of the shadow on the ground will not exceed twenty miles, so that nowhere along the narrow track of this scurrying dot will the total eclipse of the sun last more than fifty seconds. In this short time expeditions from European and American observatories will attempt to study the corona, that mysterious feature of the sun which can be seen only during total eclipse.

Fame and Fortune Weekly

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